

THE LIFE HISTORY OF EFFIE KOKRINE THROUGH PERSONAL RECORDINGS

By

Annette J. Freiburger

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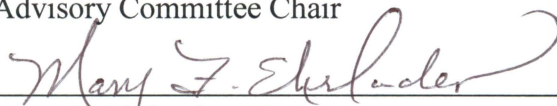
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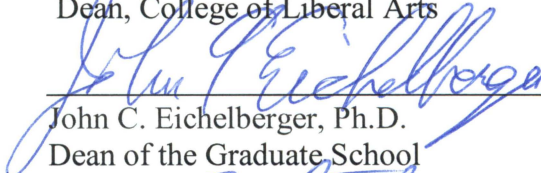


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THE LIFE HISTORY OF EFFIE KOKRINE THROUGH PERSONAL RECORDINGS

A
THESIS

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By

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Abstract

This thesis is a combination of tape transcriptions and research to document the life history of Athabascan leader Effie Folger Kokrine. Effie Kokrine was well known in the Interior of Alaska, but her impact reached much farther, and in many directions, as she loved to travel and share her stories with people in many different states and in several other countries. Sharing stories was only one of her many talents. She was an Alaska Native culture educator, a champion dog musher, an expert seamstress, skin sewer and beader, hunter, fisher, cook and bottle washer. Effie stayed active and busy right until her sudden death from heart failure. She believed that every person should contribute to the well-being of the community, and she did her part by volunteering with the Junior Dog Musher's Association, the American Legion Post #11 Women's Auxiliary, the Badger Lion's Club, and speaking to almost every group that invited her, which was many. The only reason that she would turn someone down who invited her to speak was if she had a prior commitment. She was a favorite speaker of various groups, especially those involving children, because of her history, and because of her humor. The intent of this thesis is to attempt to capture some of that history and share some of the stories.

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Chapter 1 Introduction to Athabascan Elder Effie Kokrine

1.1 Why is it Important to Complete the Story that Effie Started?

When I started working with Effie's tapes, I wanted to honor her desire to share her story. She wanted to write a book because she felt she had a history that would be interesting to people. Unfortunately, she died before that could be completed. Fortunately, we have recordings she made and they tell her story in her own words. Effie tells her story through her eyes and memory. Most of the text in this work is directly from Effie, as she reflected on her life after the age of eighty. She was thinking back to significant memories and events. She wanted to share those memories with her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Now the great-grandchildren who have been born since she passed on can read and learn a little about who Grandma Effie was.

It has taken me nearly five years to complete the thesis work on this project. I have to have an end to the thesis portion of the project, but the work will not be done. There is so much more to learn about this history. I am sure that I can continue to learn and contribute to the history of the Tanana area. For instance, when Effie talked about her grandfather, John Folger, Sr., she simply said that he was a white miner who married her Native grandmother. He would leave the family when he got restless and wanted to go back out mining. As I researched the records I learned that, in fact, John Folger was an interesting character in a relatively small group of individuals who roamed around Alaska searching for gold. This really tough group travelled great distances, checking rivers and streams for payment for their hard work. They were out in the elements in extreme temperatures and would "siwash," meaning they would camp out in the open, between cabins. The newspapers in Fairbanks would mention when miners were in town and where they were headed next. There were written accounts of this group by participants who kept journals, goods traders, and personal communications. It is a rich and fascinating record that certainly caught my interest. Unfortunately, there was not very

much written about their Native wives, and their children. An exception to this statement is the documentation of the life of Kate Carmack after the Klondike strike.¹

Effie's story, therefore, is important because she knew this life and lived with parents and grandparents who lived during the early years of the 20th Century.

I have always known that I would not have wanted to grow up in the times that Effie did. Life was just too difficult. However, it certainly created character in the people who did.

During the time that I worked on this project I became a grandmother myself. What incredible joy a small child brings into your life after your own children are grown and out of your house. Having grandchildren makes you want to be a better person. It makes you want to become a teacher, to share what knowledge you have gathered over the years. It makes me understand the passion that Effie had for working with youngsters. There is knowledge, experience and history that can be shared, and Effie worked hard in her senior years to share her knowledge with children in the schools. Often stories are lost on young kids; they most likely will not remember a story told once, particularly if it is removed from their own realities, but there are a couple of generations of Fairbanks children who remember "Grandma Effie" coming to their class.

I know that Grandma Effie shared a lot of stories with my two sons and me as we picnicked or took road trips. I do not know how much my sons remember, but I know that I forgot a lot more than I remember. For instance, when I was young I was too far removed from the context to absorb the details of the story about how her father used to hook up dogs to haul a loaded boat up river before they had motors. These are interesting stories, made more comprehensible to me as I learn more about life back then. When we as adults went to the Yukon River with our parents, then other stories were remembered and shared. There were so many stories that did not get written down. It was difficult for Effie to record stories because it did not feel natural to her. She did not like talking into a machine, so she recorded when she thought of particular stories that she wanted to share.

¹ Backhouse, Frances. *Women of the Klondike*. North Vancouver: Whitecap Books Ltd, 1995.

The stories in this collection are only a fraction of what she shared with us over the years. Often the context had to be there for her memories to flow.

I feel fortunate that Effie was my mother. She was a good friend as well as being my mother. She was extremely generous in so many ways – with her time, her resources, and her knowledge. She loved to share and felt she got more back than she gave. It might have been her humor that endeared her to people. She rarely told a story that did not include a chuckle.

And why did we always feel so safe around her? She was only five feet tall, maybe five-one. She had a presence, and I felt safe with her, either camping in bear country on the Denali Highway or on the Yukon River far from the village. One time Mom and Dad were fishing on the bank by the creek, off the Yukon River camp. They never went anywhere without guns. They heard a rustle, Mom grabbed the rifle, said “Bear!” as she turned and slapped the rifle into Dad’s hand. He shot and killed the bear within twenty feet of where they were. She had such confidence in her own abilities; we may as well have been walking with Wyatt Earp.



Fig. 1.1.1 Effie Walking with a Rifle on the Banks of the Yukon

1.2 Who was Effie Kokrine? Some Background Information

Effie Kokrine passed away just after midnight on November 2, 2001. In retrospect, I realize that her passing came shortly after 9/11, and she did not get to see the changes that 9/11 made in the world. I am sure that she was glad to see the country unified in patriotism, even though that deep feeling of common compassion did not last

for many. Effie was deeply committed to working for veterans and was herself very patriotic to the United States of America. She was proud to be an American, even though the land that she was born in was not a state but a territory of the U.S. until January 3, 1959, having been acquired from Russia on March 30, 1867. These transactions were done in rooms far removed from the lives of the Native people who had lived on the land for thousands of years, but their lives were affected by the papers signed in those distant offices. Although Effie was not quite eighty-three when she passed away, because of the year she was born and the year that she passed away she lived in ten decades. There was a lot of change in Alaska and in the lives of Native people during that time. This paper is about the transitions that she lived through and adapted to.

Effie was born in the Native village of Tanana, Alaska, in 1919. Her birth certificate states that she was born in Fort Gibbon, an Army outpost built to bring law and order to the territory and later to support the early telegraph system project to connect the United States to Russia and the rest of the world. The doctor was assigned to Fort Gibbon and he signed the Birth Certificate after Effie's birth, at which he was not present. The Birth Certificate was also signed by Commissioners Mr. and Mrs. Howard.²

Her birthplace, where the Tanana River flows into the Yukon River has long been an important trading spot, known as Noochuloghoyet,³ where a spring trading fair was called Nuchalawoyya,⁴ "where the two rivers come together". In the spring, after the ice would break up and the rivers would again flow, the interior Athabascans would bring their furs and goods to trade between tribes, then later for consumer goods from white traders. Metal items were of great value. A Russian trading post was established at

² Effie mentions having her original Birth Certificate in Chapter Two, page 47.

³ Turck, Thomas J. and Diane L. Hehman Turck identified this spot as Noochuloghoyet Point in their paper "Trading Posts along the Yukon River: Noochuloghoyet Trading Post in Historical Context," 1991, in *Arctic* Vol. 45, No. 1 (March 1992) p. 51-61. There are many variations of the name. This is the spelling that is in the Koyukon Dictionary, by Jules Jette' and Eliza Jones, though it is two words in the dictionary.

⁴ Noochuloghoyet and Nuchalawoyya are Koyukon Athabaskan (Denakke'e) names. Koyukon is one of eleven Athabaskan dialects identified by Dr. Michael Krauss, Professor Emeritus, UAF, founder of the Alaska Native Language Center, and author of "Krauss, Michael, Gary Holton, Jim Kerr, and Colin T. West. 2011. Indigenous Peoples and Languages of Alaska. Fairbanks and Anchorage: Alaska Native Language Center and UAA Institute of Social and Economic Research. Online: <http://www.uaf.edu/anla/map>"

Nulato⁵ in 1838, and at some point the Russians started to come up the river from Nulato to harvest the rich bounty of furs from Athabascan traders. Later, the British traders of Hudson's Bay Company upriver sent several parties of Indians to trade at Noochuloghoyet. The spring trading fair did not always happen at the same spot but happened at whichever spot in the area was amenable to extended camping.⁶

In 1869, Francois Mercier established a trading station for Hutchinson, Kohn and Company three miles downstream from the mouth of the Tanana River. In 1870 the name was changed to Alaska Commercial Company. The station amalgamated with Perrotte (Parrott) Company, established at Noukelakayet Station, and assumed the name Tanana Station.⁷

There were several trading posts situated in roughly a twenty mile stretch of the river, many using a variation of the name Noukelakayet or Tanana, from 1868 on. In 1874 well known prospector Arthur Harper joined Al Mayo in establishing a trading post in Tanana near the traditional site of Nuklukayet.⁸

In 1880, the Alaska Commercial Trading Company established a trading post thirteen miles downriver from the present site, run by Arthur Harper, and sometimes called Harper's Station. One year later, in 1881, the Church of England missionaries built a mission eight miles downriver.⁹ The St. James Mission was constructed between 1887 and 1900 and consisted of a school and hospital complex.¹⁰

Travelers stopped and camped at various locations along the river and the camps became known to other white people by the names of the people who stayed there for any length of time. Capt. Billie Moore, in an application for Alaska Pioneers' allowance,

⁵ Nulato is an Athabascan village approximately 200 miles downriver from Tanana.

⁶ Turck, Thomas J. and Diane L. Hehman Turck, "Trading Posts along the Yukon River: Noochuloghoyet Trading Post in Historical Context," p. 51-61.

⁷ Francois X. Mercier. *Recollections of the Youkon: Memoires from the Years 1868-1885* (Anchorage: Alaska Historical Society), 5-11

⁸ Arthur Harper. <http://alaskamininghalloffame.org/inductees/harper.php>

⁹ The Mission was later moved upriver from Fort Gibbon. LitSite Alaska. Tanana Mission: Mission of Our Savior. <http://www.litsite.org>. St. James became the name of the Episcopal Church in Tanana.

¹⁰ Tanana Community Database Online, www.commerce.state.ak/tanana

recalled that Gordon (G.C.) Bettles¹¹ had acquired a post at Nuklukayet after the death of a trader named Walker.¹²

Around 1896, Alaska Commercial Company moved the trading post to Tanana Village. In 1897 Northern Transportation and Trading Company established a store in Tanana. These two companies later merged, becoming N.N.Co. By this time, the name Noochuloghoyet was no longer used for any of the trading posts.¹³

During the gold rush, beginning in the summer of 1897 in an area widely known as the Nome District several discoveries brought in an influx of people. Functional law was practically non-existent. The War Dept. of the U.S. Army sent Captain P.H. Ray to check out the situation and make a recommendation for the establishment of Army forts to control the turmoil that accompanied the gold seekers. Captain Ray recommended that at least two companies be placed at the mouth of the Tanana River. Nuklukayet was selected as the site for Fort Gibbon:

By G.O. #93 [General Order, number ninety-three], dated War. Dept., May 10, 1899, that part of Alaska lying north latitude parallel was created a district to be known as the District of North Alaska, and Major P.H. Ray, 8th Inf., was assigned to its command, with headquarters at one of the posts on the Yukon to be selected by him.

On July 15, 1899, Major Ray sailed from St. Michael with troops and supplies, arriving opposite the mouth of the Tanana on the 26th. Two companies (E and F) of the Seventh Infantry were landed and placed in camp at this point—then known as Weare—and after locating here the

¹¹ Gordon Bettles married Sophia Kokrine, daughter of Gregory Kokrine and his second wife Talo-ileno. Sophia would have been the half-sister of Andrew Kokrine, Sr., father to Effie's husband, Andrew, Jr.

¹² Brown, William, *Gaunt Beauty, Tenuous Life: Historic Resources Study*, Chapter 3: Early Mining and Klondike Overflow for the Gates of the Arctic

¹³ Turck, Thomas J. and Diane L. Hehman Turck "Trading Posts along the Yukon River: Noochuloghoyet Trading Post in Historical Context," 1991, in *Arctic* Vol. 45, No. 1 (March 1992) p. 51-61.

new post of Fort Gibbon, Major Ray continued on up the Yukon on July 27th.¹⁴

Fort Gibbon, by direction of the President, was named in honor of the late Brigadier General John G. Gibbon who died February 6, 1896, after fifty years of active service.

Beside law and order, the main function of the fort was to house a station of the Alaska Military Cable and Telegraph System and to help maintain the telegraph line between Fairbanks and Nome. Fort Gibbon and Tanana grew to be a large community of soldiers, families, white settlers, and merchants. The population was in the thousands at one point, with up to ten liquor distributors. The Native village, which was predominantly Athabascan, was located upriver from Fort Gibbon. Fort Gibbon looked similar to turn of the century towns across the country, with wooden sidewalks, houses made out of milled lumber and huge government-built structures, including hospital, officers' quarters, barracks, etc.¹⁵ The town of Tanana housed a post office, hotels, a jailhouse, stores and recreation halls. The inhabitants of Tanana and the village were more likely to live in cabins made of locally cut logs. In Effie's testimony, she describes how doctors were sometimes, but not always, available to assist Natives with medical needs. Basically the two communities were separated by distance of several miles and culture.

Tanana/Fort Gibbon was a busy hub during the time that the steamships were the main mode of transportation in Interior Alaska with a fairly large population.¹⁶ Once air travel became more prevalent and with the expansion of the Alaska Railroad the use of steamers declined. Fort Gibbon closed in 1924 and the population of Tanana was greatly reduced. Over time the old buildings were dismantled. Tanana currently bears no evidence of the once thriving fort and commerce center. As Fairbanks grew, it became known as the central hub of Alaska. This was in part due to Judge Wickersham's

¹⁴ Farnsworth Family papers, Series 1: Maj. Gen. Charles S. Farnsworth, Box 1: Correspondence Files 1899-1943, Archives & Manuscripts, Alaska and Polar Regions Collections, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

¹⁵ Major General Farnsworth identified thirty-eight buildings constructed at Fort Gibbon 1902-1907.

¹⁶ Maj. Gen. Farnsworth listed twenty-seven steamboats that traveled the Yukon and Tanana Rivers.

preference for Fairbanks becoming the judicial and administrative center of the interior of Alaska, along with Fairbanks being the terminus for the Alaska Railroad.¹⁷



Fig. 1.2.1 Fort Gibbon, Charles E. Bunnell Collection, UAF 1958-1026-1234 Archives, Alaska and Polar Regions Collection, University of Alaska Fairbanks



Fig. 1.2.2 Entrance to Fort Gibbon, Tanana, Alaska, Mrs. George Frye Photograph Collection, UAF 1972-117-19, Archives, Alaska and Polar Regions Collection, University of Alaska Fairbanks

¹⁷ Campbell, Charles. "A History of the Episcopal Mission of Our Saviour in Tanana, Alaska." City of Tanana, 1985.



**Fig. 1.2.3 Town of Tanana, Edward R. McFarland Photographs Collection,¹⁸
UAF 1974-130-121, Archives, Alaska and Polar Regions Collection,
University of Alaska Fairbanks**

Effie's parents, in her own words, were considered half-breeds. The mothers on both sides of her family were Native women who married white men. White men had come into the Interior to hunt for gold, to trap or trade. Many men lived with Native women, and when officials of the U.S. Government came through, they performed marriage ceremonies for the couples who were living together. That did not necessarily mean that the couples stayed together, as adventurous people tend to roam, and circumstances could cause a person to leave their home, not by choice but mandate, as was the case with both Effie's father and grandfather.

Much of Effie's life encompassed change and learning. As a small child she was learning the life cycles of people who lived on the river, between a Native subsistence cycle and earning a living by opportunities that presented themselves in the early years of

¹⁸ This photo is looking upriver from the Fort Gibbon Wireless Tower.

gold mining after the Klondike Gold Rush and the heavy use of steamboats on the major river systems in Alaska. Her grandfathers and father cut wood for use in the mining communities and for the steamboats, which required great quantities of wood. Generally, people cut the wood, stacked it, and if a passing boat wanted to buy the wood, it would stop. As explained by Effie, rather than an exchange of money, wood cutters would receive credit at the closest store or trading post.

Effie was always exposed to non-Native (White) people, but her main exposure and early training came from her mother and Native grandmothers. As she stated, the family always had elders living with them.

Starting at a very early age she was separated from her nuclear family when she had to start school, and the family migrated to winter camp. Her first experience living in a boarding school environment was at the Mission school with Mr. and Mrs. Fullerton. Effie didn't seem overly concerned about the separation from her family. She knew that the situation was temporary, and she enjoyed having other children to play with.



Fig. 1.2.4 Effie (top, 3rd from left) with Children at the Mission School

More life-altering to twelve-year-old Effie was climbing onto the steamboat to leave her home community for a boarding school far away without knowing when she would return. She had no concept of where she was going, just that she had to take the

steamboat very far to Nenana, where she would get on the train for a two day trip to a place called Eklutna, which she knew nothing about. She was rather excited to ride on a steamboat, however. She had seen them travel up and down the river, and to get to ride on one was a treat. The excitement ebbed as the boat pulled out of dock and she realized that she was leaving everything familiar. I don't know if she had ever seen a train before landing in Nenana, possibly in a picture book, but there were no trains in Tanana.

Many rural students still pack up in the fall to attend boarding schools, as many villages and rural communities lack local high schools, or students and their families may choose a school such as Mt. Edgecumbe in Sitka for the school's reputation as a high quality academic institution. Mt. Edgecumbe is a high school that prepares students for continuing education. Students prepare and apply for entrance into that particular school.



Fig. 1.2.5 Steamboats *Dawson* and *Yukon* in Tanana
Rivenburg, Lawyer and Cora Photograph Albums Collection, UAF 1994-70-396
Archives, Alaska and Polar Regions Collection, University of Alaska Fairbanks

Effie's experience was vastly different, in that she had little time to prepare, mentally or emotionally. She learned hours before she boarded the boat that she would be going away to a very foreign environment. She was twelve, but she was very naïve, having spent her life in a very small area of rural Alaska and having very protective and controlling parents. It did help that there were other children on board who were sharing the same experience, and some were older and nurturing.

Upon arrival in Nenana the students were boarded onto the train to Eklutna, which took two days. It was part of the regular schedule for the train to overnight in a community called Curry, where passengers enjoyed staying at the luxurious Curry Hotel. The following is from the Curry Hotel website:

[The History of the Curry Hotel - excerpt from alaskarails.org web site]¹⁹

Curry began its colorful life as a section station for maintenance of Way. In 1922 A.E.C. Chairman Fredrick Mears named the station at mile 248.5 after Congressman Charles F. Curry of California, chairman of the Committee on Territories. Charles Curry was a heavy supporter of the railroad in congress and the honor was accepted with a warm note of thanks.

Because Curry was halfway between Seward and Fairbanks, it presented an ideal spot for travelers and rail workers to spend the night during the two-day steam train trip. Furthermore, a new stylish resort would hold the potential to draw additional passenger revenue.

Billed as "a palace in the wilderness where accommodations are modern, inviting and comfortable and the cuisine of highest order," the Curry Hotel opened in 1923. A special 14 passenger gas car service operated to Willow or Montana Creeks for trout and grayling fishing.

As the popularity of the resort grew, so did its offerings. A suspension footbridge across the Susitna River was built in the summer of 1924. Amazingly, this bridge was 537 feet long, 4 feet wide and was hung between two 31 foot high metal towers. Across the bridge, atop a 2600 foot mountain, a shelter house was erected for the benefit of tourists and others. This was called Regalvista because of the magnificent view of Mount McKinley from this point. This was a 5 mile hike over the Meadow Lake Trail. By 1925, Curry was already becoming a very popular resort.

¹⁹ John's Alaska Railroad Page. "Curry Hotel." www.alaskarails.org/historical/curry/

Staying in a luxury hotel was quite a treat for the young village girl, who had never even used a flush toilet before. I can imagine that this experience might have contributed to Effie's love of adventure and travel.

The next three years of Effie's life were dictated by the clock and assigned duties in addition to her schooling. The school was a vocational training institute, and she had plenty of time to hone her skills in sewing on a treadle sewing machine and working in the kitchen and dining room. Eklutna was a fairly large campus with multiple buildings. Every student had chores to do, mostly on a rotating basis so they could experience various duties necessary to maintain the campus. In Chapter Three Effie talked about her duties and some of the supervisors that she had, but said little about the other children at Eklutna. Some students went on to become leaders in the state, but I do not know what the student population looked like in the years 1931-1934. Research shows that a percentage of the students came from the northern and western regions of Alaska, so Effie would have had exposure to children from Inupiat and Yupik cultures and possibly other cultures in addition to Athabascan children from many different communities. The Athabascan region of Alaska covers over 235,000 square miles, so there are different customs and dialects from one end of the region to the other, though they are similar enough for people to be able to communicate.



**Fig. 1.2.6 Eklutna Vocational School Collection; Anchorage Museum,
Gift of Hortense Hanshew, B1980.026.1.3**

After Effie made the decision that she was ready to leave Eklutna, and was granted permission from her mother to return to Tanana, she had another issue to deal with that she had not had to deal with in her school situation. She was nearing the age where most women in her culture were married.

Effie was not ready for marriage and was hoping that she would have time to enjoy being a teenager, visiting with friends and attending dances and socializing. The reality that she was presented with was much different than her fond dreams.

Immediately upon returning to the same boat that took her to Nenana, the steamboat “Yukon,” Effie was reminded that she had committed to marry the fireman on the steamer. This was a capricious agreement made hastily, without conviction, due to Effie’s social awkwardness at age twelve. She did not expect to be confronted with a commitment of marriage to someone she didn’t know well and who was obviously older

than her. Even though she tried to renege, she felt badgered into agreeing to the marriage.

Her family now included a step-father, his family and additional babies born while Effie was away. Her mother had married Sam Joseph, whom she remained married to until her death. Both Jessie and Sam were pleased with news that Effie would marry Ambrose, the fireman. To them it was a good arrangement, as Ambrose had a steady job and reliable income. The only person who was not happy with the prospect was Effie. She did not want to be married to anyone, including Ambrose. She wanted to have the experience of having fun and meeting new people and, hopefully, falling in love.

Somehow Effie conjured the courage to call off the marriage, to the chagrin of her mother and step-father. Life became more uncomfortable for Effie. Her parents were upset with her, and worse, her step-father started to talk to others about marrying Effie. She told me many times that every time he drank with someone he tried to marry her off. In Chapter Three Effie recalls one man in particular that Sam tried to set her up with. She really did not want anything to do with the older, white man. She was so afraid to be bartered into an arranged marriage that she summoned the inner strength to chart her own future by contacting a man that she was attracted to, Andrew Kokrine, a man who was tall and dark, of mixed blood, descending from Russian and Athabascan parents on both sides of his family.

In Chapter Four Effie talked about her feelings of disappointment in marriage and made other references to their later marriage, but she did not talk much about all the good times that they shared in their forty-two years together, which is disappointing to her children who read the manuscript. All of us children had great love and pride in our father. He was a strong, determined man, fair in judgment. He had a long history of hard work that took him around the state, working on projects such as the Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line, White Alice and building infrastructure from Ladd Field (Fort Wainwright), the North Slope to the University of Alaska Fairbanks. He was an excellent carpenter, dog handler, story-teller, card player and billiard player.

I believe that what Effie wanted was a loving, monogamous marriage like she read about in her romance magazines and novels. She was a wonderful person but she could really hold a grudge, and the fact that their marriage was not always happy is the responsibility that both had to share. I know that they loved each other, that they danced well together, they loved listening to music (dad used to play the fiddle and mandolin but quit after they moved to Fairbanks), camping, hunting, and cooking together. Both were great cooks.

In their early marriage Andrew brought Effie up the Yukon River, where he had grown up close to Rapids, between Tanana and Rampart. She fell in love with the beauty of the Yukon, developing a deep respect for the river's power. It was different in many ways from the Tanana River, where Effie had spent summers growing up with her father and grandfathers, who worked for miners, cutting wood and hauling freight.²⁰ Effie's love for the Yukon endured throughout her lifetime.

Throughout their marriage Effie and Andrew always had dogs. Dogs were an important part of their early lives. Before cars or snow machines, dogs were used as the main source of transportation in Alaska, mainly in the winter by sled, but they were also used to pull freight on boats along the rivers in the summer. Andrew was an expert dog trainer, and along with his brother, Bergman, became a winning dog racer. Bergman and Andrew started traveling to Fairbanks to compete in larger races that offered money awards. Andrew won the first two North American Sled Dog Championships in 1946 and 1947, although the race was called the Fairbanks Dog Derby in 1946. Andrew got Effie into racing after their move to Fairbanks. She had raced in Tanana and loved competing but was at first scared to race in Fairbanks, which was still unfamiliar to her. At that time she lacked confidence in her ability as a racer and still felt like a villager, out of her element.

Andrew's work as a carpenter transitioned the family to Fairbanks in 1949. They did not consider the move permanent at the time, but they never moved back to Tanana, although they continued a close relationship with family and community there, visiting

²⁰ Effie's paternal grandfather, John Folger, Sr., was a miner and had at least one successful gold strike.

whenever they were able, and maintaining graves at the Mission and the city graveyard, where family members were buried.²¹

After the move to Fairbanks Effie had to live in a predominantly white community. Four children were born after the move.²² Effie had to figure out a way to exist, earn a wage, and raise her family. This was no easy feat, since at first she was so shy she could barely speak when asked a question. Andrew entered her in her first race.

Effie became the first woman to win the Women's North American Sled Dog Championship three years in a row, in 1952, 1953 and 1954. She continued until she suffered a stroke and was banned from racing. During her racing tenure she became a grandmother and earned the moniker of the Racing Grandmother and later was known as the Grandmother of Dog Racing, titles she wore with pride.

She was always remembered as a champion dog musher, the first woman to ever win the Women's North American Championship Sled Dog Races three years in a row. Through that feat she met many people from all walks of life. She developed friendships that lasted a life-time. She was, by Fairbanks standards, a celebrity. Fairbanks is such an awesome community for recognizing people who contribute through work or skill. People who might not get a nod in other places are appreciated for uniqueness here. It is one of the characteristics that make Fairbanks a special place to live.

Along with other adult mushers she helped found the Junior Dog Mushers Association. She worked with that organization for over thirty years, watching many grandchildren and great-grandchildren participate. For thirty years she made a prize for the youngest musher, which was either a fur hat, fur mittens, a vest, or a colorful kuspuk²³ (a summer or dance parka). The children loved Grandma Effie, which is how she was known to generations of children in Fairbanks and Tanana.

²¹ Effie's husband Andrew was buried in the city graveyard in 1978. Their son, Robert, was buried there in 2002, a year after Effie passed away. Effie is buried in Birch Hill Cemetery in Fairbanks in a grave site that she selected, at the urging of her children.

²² Effie had her first child in 1937, and her last child in 1955, eleven children in total, although three died in Tanana at early ages, when epidemics were still sweeping through the villages with little medicine to control the lethal effects of disease brought in by travelers

²³ Kuspuk is a Yupik word for the jacket. The Denaakk'e word is bets'eghe hoolaane.

Over the years Effie's confidence grew, her family grew, her groups of friends grew and her importance to children grew until she was known in Fairbanks, Tanana and other communities as Grandma Effie. That is what she preferred to be called. She saw herself as everyone's Grandma, and she received hugs everywhere she went.

Native people in Fairbanks, particularly in the earlier days, knew each other and for the most part supported each other. In the 1960's the Native organizations were forming, which gave a collective voice to the growing Native population. Effie was never at the forefront of politically active groups, but she was there and spoke when asked her opinion.

Effie was friends with people who were more comfortable stepping up to leadership roles. She attended informal, then organizational meetings for the Fairbanks Native Organization (FNA). At that time Effie was still not comfortable speaking in public, but she supported the ideals behind forming an organization that would help rural Native people adjust to Fairbanks, either as guests of the city for dog races or as new residents. She remembered the difficulties that her family experienced upon their arrival. She sat around the table of Poldine and Bill Carlo with other Native people as they discussed the unmet needs of visitors and transplants. That was a strong and vocal bunch, who with little parliamentary experience formed an enduring and politically strong non-profit organization. Organizers who received credit for founding FNA were Bill and Poldine Carlo, Ralph Perdue, Nick Gray, Mary Jane and Bud Fate, Morris Thompson, Margie Wright, John Sackett, and Max Huhndorf.²⁴

As the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act was finalized, creating large regional Alaska Native corporations, other leaders emerged. Doyon, Ltd., was created to serve the people of the Interior. Tanana Chiefs Conference, Inc., was created as the non-profit arm of Doyon. Together, these organizations carried political clout.

One of the most economically successful, politically influential and loved leaders of Doyon, Ltd., was Morris Thompson, who as a young boy in Tanana loved listening to the stories that Effie shared with children who gathered at her house. Any kindness that

²⁴ Fairbanks Native Association website, History category. www.fairbanksnative.org/

Effie showed “Big Boy”²⁵ as a child was paid back by the powerful representative of a multi-million dollar organization. Morris invited Effie to gala events and invited her to speak to visitors at the Kantishna Roadhouse in Denali Park. He called her Aunt Effie and treated her with favor.

I stated earlier that everyone called Effie Grandma Effie, but there were many people who called her Aunt Effie, so I guess that was not a totally accurate statement. It certainly was true that many people felt a connection to Effie, as a friend or beloved Elder. Effie attended conferences for Denakkanaaga,²⁶ meetings for a multitude of organizations, and sat on the councils of selected providers, particularly if they were related to education. At Interior-Aleutians Campus (IAC), where I am employed, Effie served on the Advisory Council and was an Elder Advisor in the Rural Human Services Program.²⁷ There is high demand for Elders to act as advisors in the Native community, and volunteering kept Effie very busy. She was very fulfilled by sharing her life experiences and knowledge with others.

Effie’s hard work, willingness to volunteer, cheerful nature and keen sense of humor gained her entry into many groups and organizations. Through the years she became very well known in Fairbanks and throughout the Interior of Alaska.

Effie created beautiful Native crafts, including parkas, mukluks, fur mittens, beaded gloves, fur trapper hats and knotted fish nets. Her bead patterns were made into a booklet published by Fairbanks Native Association. She created stunning eagle designs for the moose skin vests that she hand stitched for her three sons. The first was for her middle son, who was a Viet Nam veteran. It was through this service that she became involved with the American Legion Women’s Auxiliary. She stayed involved with the Dorman Baker Post #11 in Fairbanks for over twenty years, holding many offices. Effie’s husband, Andrew, was the first Alaska Native to become a member of the Fraternal Order of Eagles. He was an excellent pool player and competed on their pool team. Effie later decided to become a pool player as well. She joined the women’s pool

²⁵ Morris Thompson was known as “Big” to family and friends throughout his life

²⁶ Denakkanaaga is a non-profit whose mission is to be a resource for Elders. They have an annual convention in one of the villages in the Doyon region, with participation from both youth and elders.

²⁷ Rural Human Services is one of the academic programs developed through IAC.

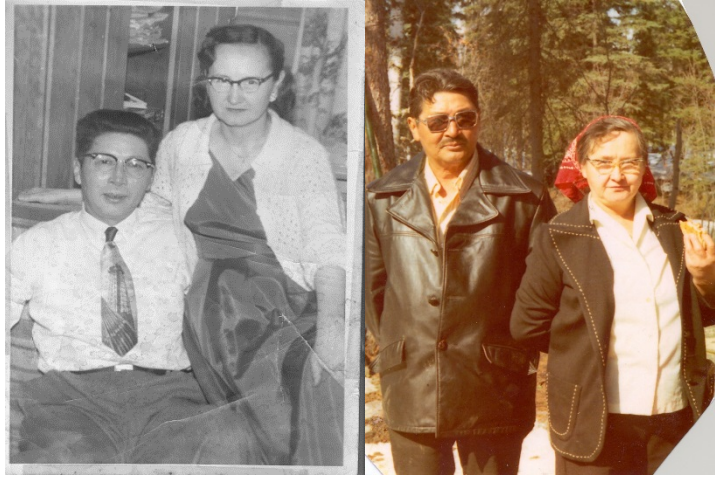
team for the American Legion and competed against other service organizations. She could do just about anything she put her mind to.

Effie's and Andrew's lives and their relationship changed upon retirement and their return to the Yukon River camp where Andrew grew up. They both had such a deep love for the river, and returning there fulfilled something missing from their lives during the years living in Fairbanks. They enjoyed the years on the river so profoundly, it was a great final chapter of their marriage. Effie had a hard-working, skilled partner who, with son Bob and grandson Jerry, could build a fish wheel and get it running within a week. During those years they caught and processed up to 300 fish a day.

Effie was only fifty-nine years old when Andrew died. Again, she had to define her role in the world. She had been married since she was sixteen. It did not take long for other opportunities to fill her life. She was always a busy person.



Figs. 1.2.7, 1.2.8 Early Married Years, 1936 or 1937



Figs. 1.2.9, 1.2.10 Andy and Effie from the 50s and late 60s



Fig. 1.2.11 Last Photo Together, 1978

One of Effie's passions was education. For over twenty years Effie worked in the schools in both Fairbanks and Tanana. She taught students about Athabascan culture, subsistence and survival. Local elementary teacher Sharon Attla said, "She had a way of talking to children that was very engaging. She made people proud to be Athabascan, and made me proud to be from Tanana."²⁸ Effie was so effective at teaching in the Alaska Native Education Program of the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District and as an active member of the Association of Interior Native Educators (AINE) that she was

²⁸ This quote was paraphrased from a recorded interview with Sharon Attla that was used in the video "Grandma Effie: Elder, Mentor, Friend" by Annette Freiburger, 2008.

awarded “Teacher of the Year” at the annual meeting of AINE in 2001, an honor that she equated to receiving an honorary doctorate from the university.

Travel was a pleasure that Effie indulged in later in life, once she no longer bore the burden of house payments or raising children. She loved to visit new places, sometimes without knowing much of where she was headed, but many of her trips were to visit children living “outside” of Alaska. Her youngest child, Cindy, lived in Mississippi, after meeting and marrying a man from the southern state during construction of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline. Effie probably made twenty trips to Mississippi. She also made four trips to southwest Colorado while I was an undergraduate student at Fort Lewis College in Durango, and again when I was being treated for cancer at the San Juan Cancer Center in Durango. Effie was generous with her time, and all her resources, always bringing or making beautiful hand-crafted gifts while visiting. She never liked idle time, so she was always sewing, knitting, crocheting or beading. She was a superb artist, creating many items that were durable, well-designed, efficient, but in high demand for their beauty. Besides her beading she knitted well-designed socks, crocheted colorful rugs, and hand sewed quilts – there didn’t seem to be an end to her talents. She learned to do whatever attracted her.

Another fond destination of travel for Effie was the Philippines, where she participated in organized trips to visit the faith healers. Effie made approximately eight trips before the long flights became too difficult for her.²⁹ She believed that the health care that she received through the faith healers prolonged her life and relieved clots in her circulatory system. The trips were exotic and exciting for Effie. She took hundreds of photos of the people, the animals, the breath-taking scenery and the procedures that were performed without drugs or tools, other than the healing hands of the “doctors.” As usual, Effie found humor in events and took advantage of opportunities to have fun.

²⁹ Flights from Fairbanks to Manila took a total of 16 hours air time, and usually included stops in Seattle, Honolulu, and Tokyo.



Fig. 1.2.12 Fun in the Philippines

Several regular companions on these trips became dear friends to Effie. Local banker Bill Stroecker, his wife Eleanor, and Bill's sister Marion shared many journeys and adventures. I intended to meet with Mr. Stroecker to talk about the many trips they took together and get additional information, but I waited too long. Bill Stroecker passed away on November 8, 2010, at the age of 90. His wife and sister predeceased him.

Effie had the ability to make friends wherever she traveled, and in whatever venue she found herself. She made a lasting impact. Our family received beautiful cards, letters of condolence, and many kind words and gestures following her death.

By the last decade of her life she was speaking in front of large groups of people, charming politicians as esteemed as the late Senator Ted Stevens, and enjoying the limelight. She loved to make people laugh, even at her own expense, so she could be extremely silly.

Some community members recommended that Effie interview as a potential contestant when Bill Cosby's *You Bet Your Life* crew came to Fairbanks to seek out interesting Alaskans. She charmed the interviewers and won a trip to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to appear on the show. It was a thrill of her life to meet Bill Cosby, whom Effie greatly admired.

How she managed to transcend from shy wall flower to performing on television with Bill Cosby is a testament to her ability to recreate herself. She was Effie, and everyone loved Effie.

She became an Elder, highly respected, greatly loved and admired, genuinely and truly missed upon her death. Effie was a woman of adaptation and transition. She lived in ten decades (1919-2001), even though she was not quite eighty-three when she passed. She had a lot of stories to tell, and I am really happy to have been the one chosen to pull this effort together.

Effie was able to endure many difficulties and challenges throughout her life. It was her stubborn nature and uncomplaining determination in the face of loneliness, the death of children, the demands of her life, the shortages of food, and the unreasonable expectations put upon her (which she noted and resented, but endured so solidly) that helped her survive.

I hope to be able to keep her memory alive and share her stories with her grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. It is important for them to know about the life that Effie lived, the good along with the tragic.

1.3 The Relationship Between Effie Kokrine and Annette Freiburger

My name is Annette Josephine Kokrine Freiburger,³⁰ and I am the fifth daughter, and the ninth child born to Effie and Andrew Kokrine. Of the eleven children carried to birth, eight children lived past age three to become adults. In the 30's and 40's in Alaska, a time of rapidly spread disease, limited medical care and medication, sometimes scarce stores of food, along with extreme physical work, it was common to lose infants.

Effie's first child, a daughter named Shirley May, died of meningitis at the very young age of three. Only after I became a mother did I realize how excruciating that experience was for my mother. She kept several pictures of Shirley and talked about her now and again, but only once did we talk about how she felt when her first baby died. It was a sad time for Effie, and she talked about Shirley as a toddler...how she used to follow her mother around "just like a little shadow." Effie lost two boys, one a stillbirth

³⁰ Effie said that Andrew did not want my middle name to be Josephine, in honor of her friend, but Effie told him that it was a variation of his middle name, Joseph. He agreed to that.

and the other to the same influenza epidemic that led to the death of her mother and many others in Tanana. Effie talks about this epidemic and losing her son, Johnny Boy,³¹ in Chapter 4.

As I get older I appreciate my mother more and more and admire her for how she always seemed to do so much with so little. I cannot say that we were always close or that I appreciated her as a parent when I was young, particularly in my teen years. We became extremely close as I aged and became wiser. I believe that I developed my ability to persuade by trying to figure out how I could avoid being in trouble with her.

I grew up in the 60's, and 70's. I totally embraced the values and cultural change that was happening in America. I liked the ideal of the hippie culture. It had true meaning and value to me, and I look back at that time with great fondness and sentiment.

She was pretty strict with us as teens, and I know that I pushed the limits a lot. I do not think that I was as bad as she feared that I was, and I was not having nearly as much fun as she thought I was.

Unfortunately my dad, Andrew, died when I was only twenty-six. I loved my dad, and we were developing a great relationship when he died. My older siblings have much more recollection of his essence, his power and his influence. He was a great man, though his life changed significantly after moving to Fairbanks in 1949, and his priorities changed from a subsistence life and being a champion dog racer to being a champion pool player. He was the captain of the Eagles raft Great Tanana River Raft Classic from Fairbanks to Nenana.³²

All of the changes that our family experienced were due to changes in Alaska Native culture, and wage earning opportunity. My father was an excellent carpenter and spent thirty-seven years in the Carpenters Union. A study of my father's life will have to be a future project. He was an extraordinary man who, like my mother, adapted to cultural change and excelled. It is such a shame that he only lived to age sixty-seven. As I am entering my sixties, and my older siblings are either in their sixties, or already

³¹ Johnny Boy was a nick-name; his real name was Andrew Bergman.

³² I found a video of the 1970 raft race on You Tube when I search for the race. The video was from the University of Alaska Elmer E. Rasmuson Library Alaska File Archives. It was labeled "Third Annual Great Tanana Raft Race, AAF-6134, KTVF Collection, May 23, 1970, Color/Silent, 06:30 TT."

passed on, sixty-seven seems like such an early end to life. One thing I can say is that cigarette smoking can rob a person of precious years. My father quit smoking six years before he passed, but the damage was already done. He died of heart failure after going through surgery to remove a cancer from his lung.

After my father died, I developed a much stronger relationship to my mother. She needed support, and I was happy to be able to be there for her. I was still in the working-on-the-pipeline stage of my life, so my presence was intermittent. I lived in a cabin she owned next to her house on Front Street in Graehl, a subdivision on the north side of the Chena River in Fairbanks, where quite a few Native families settled in the 1940's and 1950's.³³ While living there I had an opportunity to visit my parents as a young adult. Also, as I made significant money for the first time in my life, I was able to give my parents gifts, to visit them in their camp on the Yukon River, and I felt like I could start to pay back their continual support of my development as a person. I loved being with them and starting to recognize them as mentors, and I appreciate how much cultural knowledge they possessed. I only wish that I had more time with my dad. Losing my father at such a young age made me realize how important it was to listen to and learn from my mother.³⁴ I believe that I was, basically, a very self-centered person before that time. I did not think that it was my role to nurture others – that was left to my parents and older siblings. I only had to think of what I wanted and needed for myself.

In 1981 I married Vince Freiburger, whom I met when I finally decided to take advantage of the money-making opportunities of the pipeline through Alaska, constructed to bring oil from Prudhoe Bay to the terminal at Valdez. We met at Camp Atigun, the Shangri La of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline, in 1976. When we decided to marry I chose to leave that lifestyle, which consisted of working up to twelve weeks at a time and taking

³³ I heard for the first time, from Kathy Jorgensen Hodges, a childhood friend who lived close to our original home in Graehl, that Fairbanks was more segregated in those days, and that Graehl was one area where it was acceptable for Alaska Native families to live.

³⁴ I was 26 years old when my dad died. When I was very young he had a lot of Raven stories. He was a great story-teller. I wanted him to tell those stories later so I could record them, but he had forgotten them.

an R & R (Rest and Relaxation) vacation for weeks or months at a time. Others have documented life on the “pipeline,” so I will not expand on that experience.³⁵

Vince and I decided to buy our own house. We contacted a realtor and talked about what we would like to look for – a house where we could raise two children. Plus, I did not want to move too far away from my mother. It happened that a house had just come on the market within the last two hours in Island Homes, another Fairbanks subdivision that was right across the slough from Graehl. We were excited to look at the house, which was five years old at that time and had only one prior owner. The house was built where there used to be woods that I played in as a child. It was a three-bedroom, two bathroom split-level with a large yard. We walked into the house and up the stairs to the semi-open kitchen, dining and living room arrangement. I walked into the kitchen and looked out the window. I could see my mother’s house, with a clear view of her front door and yard. I said I wanted the house before we even saw the rest of it. The house was perfect for us. There was a two-car garage and a downstairs recreation room, which became a Packer’s theme bar for my husband, who grew up thirty miles south of Green Bay, Wisconsin. It was quite a move from a two-room historic cabin to a three-bedroom house. When we finally moved in, I had trouble sleeping when Vince had to go back to work at Prudhoe Bay. I slept on the couch in the living room rather than be so removed from the front entry. I really have to laugh about that now, because the house has grown small over the years.

While Vince continued to travel to Prudhoe Bay, working a two-weeks-on, two-weeks-off schedule, I settled into working with Tanana Chiefs Conference, Inc., the social service branch of our regional Native corporation, Doyon, Ltd., one of the thirteen regional corporations set up under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA), which was signed into law in 1971 by President Richard Nixon, to make way for the Trans-Alaska Pipeline. I worked with Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC) for several years, taking time off and changing jobs to accommodate having our two sons, Brent and Michael. By the time Brent was born I was thirty-one and Vince was thirty-three.

³⁵Dermot Cole *Amazing Pipeline Stories: How Building the Trans-Alaska Pipeline Transformed Life in America's Last Frontier*, Epicenter Press Fairbanks/Seattle 1997.

Michael was born two years later. We had waited so long to have children that we wanted to do a good job at parenting. I was able stay home for a year with each child, having to leave jobs that I enjoyed to devote time and attention to our babies. We were fortunate because we could afford to live on the salary that Vince made working “up north.”

During those years my mother and I developed a very close relationship. She loved my boys, and she spent a lot of time teaching them about life, love, and Native culture. She tried, in vain, to teach them her native Koyukon Denaakk’e language. She and my father had made a decision to have English be the first language of their children, due to the trauma that they had experienced in boarding and mission schools, with forced separation from their native language. They did not realize that loss of native language could lead to loss of cultural understanding for their children. For their generation, it was a common practice to make decisions that parents thought would help their children assimilate to the western way of life. Unfortunately, once a language is no longer part of family communication, it is extremely difficult to recapture not only the words, but the beauty of the language. Athabascan Elders have told me that there is a richness of Athabascan words describing their world view that could not be adequately translated to the English language.³⁶

When my siblings and I were growing up, our mother would talk “Indian” to her friends who visited. We children could not understand what they were saying, so we considered it their private language. We knew that they were probably gossiping about other people, and we would never know what they were saying. Other than missing out on interesting tales, we did not really care that we could not speak Denaakk’e.³⁷ We also did not realize that something intrinsically important to our well-being had been taken from us. It was not only our family, but most of the children of that generation that lost part of their culture forever. Many of us have worked to regain part of that lost culture, but we have generally accepted the fact that we need to work for wages, we need at least some college education to compete for jobs, to be able to provide our children with

³⁶ I recall hearing that statement from both Agnes Ostlund and Poldine Carlo.

³⁷ This Athabascan word has the meaning/use as Koyukon. Patty Elias corrected my use of Koyukon.

education, the latest electronic technology, decent clothing - both fashionable and functional.

When I returned to work, my mother helped to care for our boys when Vince was at work. Otherwise, he always cared for them. She taught them so many things I cannot even begin to list them. She was a great cook, so they often got to enjoy her home cooking. Sometimes, helping her prepare a meal involved watching her cut and prepare fish, moose meat, caribou meat, beaver meat, or fowl, like wild ducks or geese. They helped pluck birds, clean fish or mix sourdough pancake batter. They planted flowers and vegetables with her, climbed the tree in her yard, cut wood on the sawhorse in the back yard, and helped smoke fish in the smokehouse. Together we went on many road-trips, camped along the Denali Highway, or made annual trips to stay at the Denali Grizzly Bear Campgrounds, owned by long-time family friends Ede and Jack Reiland,³⁸ located in Denali Park. Those trips were full of fun and learning for the boys and me.³⁹



Fig. 1.3.1 Effie, Michael, Me and Brent in Effie's Living Room, 1988

My mother and father were very familiar with Interior Alaska from years of road hunting. They loved to get away from their jobs and “town life” to hunt and fish. It seemed like they knew every road and every place to camp. When we were young we

³⁸ Jack and Ede Reiland were teachers in Tanana for many years. They raised their children in Tanana, and have maintained close relationships with many Tanana families.

³⁹ Patty Elias took Effie out to Chena Hot Springs Resort many times. On those rides, Patty said that Effie would point out the places that she used to pitch the canvas wall tent and spend the weekend camping with the kids. She would get dropped off, then Andrew would come out after he got off work, then bring everyone home.

used to load up whatever car or truck that we owned with camping gear, food, dogs and kids and head out of town for the weekend. We fished on the Copper River, camped on the Denali Highway, and drove the muddy roads to Circle. Most of the roads were dirt, and used to be a muddy mess a good part of the year. Our parents would leave us at home during hunting season, but the boys were allowed to go as they grew older.⁴⁰ Our family was still pretty traditional back then, with defined roles for girls and boys.

Mom, my boys and I would return to many of the spots that held good memories for her. On those road trips she would tell us about trips that she took in the past, some with my dad, and some with other friends. One special hunting buddy of hers was Edith Smith, who was of the Minano family.⁴¹ They had a great relationship, getting out by themselves and sharing many experiences, some documented in this story. During the trips that I took with my mother, I heard stories of her past adventures. It seemed like every hill or creek had a memory for her. I wished many times that I had taken a recorder to capture those stories. We talked about it, but we never actually carried a recorder with us, which is unfortunate, since I do not have a great memory and have forgotten so many interesting stories. Patty Elias said that she and Effie had a similar conversation while they were riding side by side in Maudrey Sommer's⁴² boat on the Yukon River, returning from a Memorial Potlatch in Ruby for the late Merriline Kangas. Effie was telling Patty stories from the past: about the Kokrine Hills, named for Andrew's grandfather, Gregory Kokrine,⁴³ who had a trading post at the settlement of Kokrines; about train trips toward Nenana and how she would get dropped off to explore; and how she pulled porcupines out of holes with a stick. Patty said that Effie should record her stories, but Effie said that she liked to tell stories to people, not to a machine.

⁴⁰ The boys were my brothers Bob, Kenny and Ray.

⁴¹ Edith was married to Patrick Smith. When their husbands wouldn't take Edie and Effie hunting, they decided to go hunting on their own. Edith lived for decades on the Tok Cutoff, until she could no longer drive, then she moved to Fairbanks for the remainder of her life.

⁴² Maudrey (sister to Morris Thompson) was another good Tanana friend of Effie's. Along with Josephine Roberts, these four women took a boat and camping trip together and the Ruby people dubbed them the "Golden Girls."

⁴³ Two Kokrine cousins are compiling a life history of Gregory Kokrine, which is still being developed. I have read a draft by William Whalley, of Washington, and have been in communication with William Hopkins, of Ketchikan.

Later, when Effie got serious about writing her life story, my sister, Dee, got her a hand-sized recorder, enabling her to reminisce whenever she remembered something that she wanted to add to her written notes, which filled yellow legal tablets. She told her friend, Patty Elias, that she knew how she wanted the book laid out, with chapters outlined in her mind. She completed approximately ten tapes before she passed away.

Patty was very important in the beginning of this project. She devoted many hours to listening, taping, and transcribing the stories Effie wanted in her narrative, making perfectly structured chapters with natural lessons at the close of each. Patty marveled at what a natural storyteller and teacher Effie was. After sitting with Effie and recording the chapters (stories and lessons), Patty did the first transcriptions. She took notes and asked questions to clarify details/relationships that were not clear. She deserves a lot of credit for assisting Effie in getting this project off the ground.⁴⁴ Unfortunately, the computer files were not available to me when I took over the project, so I had to retype everything that had been previously done. I used the printed copy that Patty had, but I transcribed all the tapes myself so I could hear my mother telling the stories and get to know each story intimately.

Patty became friends with Effie back in the 1970s. She had first arrived during the Great Flood of 1967 as a VISTA Volunteer assigned to Tanana. She was only seventeen when she left her home and family in Minnesota. She was intrigued and captivated by the people of Tanana. In those days Tanana was village of approximately 500, mostly Athabascan inhabitants. She quickly became part of people's families, a friend to all the kids, teen-agers, and drawn to the Elders who were eager to teach her traditional skills and practices. She began to learn Denaakk'e words and phrases that described action and sentiment.

The relationship between Patty and Effie was cemented through many shared rides and stories. Patty would call Effie when she was in Fairbanks and they would drive to Chena Hot Springs, or the Yukon River Bridge. In Tanana Patty would provide rides

⁴⁴ Patty stated that she was profoundly grateful for having been part of Effie's world, and for the friendship that they shared.

and her cars, 4-wheelers, canoes, boats – whatever the day called for. Whenever Patty heard that Effie was at her camp on the river it was a Bowen family tradition to go visit.

Always, when Effie came to Tanana, Patty would invite her into the school/her classroom, as an Elder-in-Residence, much like the university classes on campus.⁴⁵ Effie felt it was important to share Native culture and tradition with the kids in the Tanana school, as she had done in the Alaska Room for many years in Fairbanks. Many of Tanana's respected Elders who spoke Denaakk'e had already passed on, or were not able to teach. Even if Effie went to Tanana for a funeral or potlatch, she always found time to visit with the school children. It was so important to her to know the children, and teach them about culture, respect, and proper behavior. Patty always recorded those sessions with the K-12 kids, a few of those tapes have been transcribed, as they carry important information and show how Effie related to children.⁴⁶

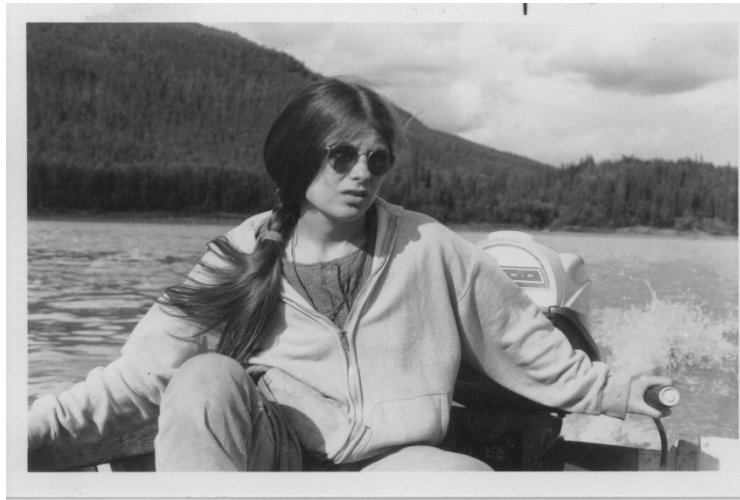


Fig. 1.3.2 Patty Elias in her Younger Years on the Yukon River

⁴⁵ Elder-in-Residence is a term used for the Alaska Native Studies course, “Knowledge of Native Elders,” at University of Alaska Fairbanks. That class invites Native Elders to come into the classroom and share their history and cultural knowledge with students. The Elders have an apartment on campus where they can meet individually with students. Students are expected to spend one-on-one time with each Elder during the semester. There are usually three Elders from different geographic areas and cultures. There are five distinctly different Native cultures in Alaska: Athabaskan, Aleut, Tlingit/Haida, Inupiat, and Yupik, with subgroups within each culture.

⁴⁶ I was hoping to include these transcripts in the thesis but it became too lengthy. Hopefully I will be able to share them in other manuscript.

Effie appealed to older students as well. She was invited to be an Elder in several college classes, including an Elder-in-Residence. College students loved visiting with Effie, and many came to her house to learn more about her life and her crafts. Effie always had a sewing machine set up in her living room, a table full of beading projects, a pair of socks partially knitted, and sometimes a skin-sewing project in progress. In her eighty-two years she never had idle time, she didn't want idle time, other than her afternoon nap on her couch with the television playing in the background and her book still open on her shoulder. Effie always had a book that she was reading. However, she avoided reading other biographies of Alaska Native people, as she wanted her book to be purely her story and not influenced by what others had written.

Dr. William (Bill) Schneider invited Effie to participate in his class, "Oral Sources: Issues in Documentation." Effie had approached Bill about helping her to get her story told. Bill thought that it would be a good idea to start recording sessions where Effie explained how Athabascan people traditionally made things, the usefulness of tools, or how they processed and stored food. The tapes that were made in these classes were transcribed by students and became part of the Oral History collection in the Alaska and Polar Regions department of the Rasmuson Library on the University of Alaska Fairbanks campus.

During this time, Bill Schneider approached me and suggested that I should be the one helping my mother write her book. Of course, I knew that would have been a great project to take on, but at the time I was working for Fairbanks Native Association as the Executive Director. That was more than a full-time job, and I normally devoted about sixty hours a week on the job, along with attending related activities. I could not see how I could possibly take on such an important project as helping my mother write a book. Fate would handle things differently. Effie passed away on November 2, 2001, the same semester that she had worked with Bill's class. I left my employment with FNA a little over two years later. Bill convinced me to enter into a Master's program at UAF, and I chose to do my mother's life history as my thesis. The finished project will be different than the book that my mother had in her mind, however. After the thesis is complete, I

hope to publish her story. So, my task is to do justice to a remarkable woman and her history.

1.4 Methodology

I had not listened to the tapes prior to Effie's passing, so I did not know what information I would later seek to add context to her stories. When I was transcribing the tapes, I made notes about areas requiring further research. Since I was not familiar with much of the topographical area discussed, I attempted to provide information that would be helpful to the future reader. I also tried to find information on people who were mentioned. While some people may find the reference notes unnecessary, I thought it was important to share information for those unfamiliar with the Alaska experience.

Tapes that were recorded either in preparation for a future book by Effie or were recorded by others are the most valuable resource for this compiled work. It is my hope that people who knew Effie will be able to "hear" her speak through the transcription of her tapes. I did have to edit the transcripts to make the stories flow more smoothly, but I did not change anything of significance. The verbatim transcriptions of the tapes are in the Oral History collection at the Rasmuson Library.⁴⁷

I had to take some liberty with editing. The reason for this is that some recordings were not complete, missing either an introduction or having been cut off before the end of a story. The tapes are old and some have been copied numerous times, leaving the integrity of some tapes poor. I made an attempt to fill in the blanks as best as I could to make the transcription understandable to the reader. For the most part, incomplete paragraphs were eliminated.

Italics were used to indicate emphasis on the word. When speaking, Effie sometimes placed strong emphasis on a particular word or phrase. Italics were also used to identify Denakke'e words, which were emphasized as well.

Effie tended to use filler words, such as "uh", and start sentences with "And, uh..." while she was gathering her thoughts, remembering conversations and/or activities. My

⁴⁷ Effie can also be heard on Tanana Tribal Council Project Jukebox, <http://jukebox.uaf.edu/TananaJBX/Index.htm>, produced by the Oral History Department at Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

first intention was to leave them in, but they used too much space and made following the story cumbersome. Editing made the story flow better.

Those who knew Effie will be able to recognize her speech patterns and will hopefully be able to visualize her sitting in her living room on Front Street sharing her memories. Many people, young and old, would visit the small house on Front Street to learn from Effie. She always took time out of her busy schedule to share skills with willing students. Those who were fortunate enough to have spent time in that small and cramped living room will still recognize her words and stories. There were so many young people who recognized that they had a valuable resource that was very accessible. After Effie passed away, many people shared stories with me about their visits and how profoundly important those visits were to them.

Of the oral history books that I have read, I liked the structure of Margaret Blackman's work with Haida Elder Florence Edenshaw Davidson, *During my Time*.⁴⁸ Margaret enjoyed a long relationship with Ms. Davidson, getting to know her and her family very well. In fact, she was adopted into the Davidson family. In my work, I was very close to Effie, but we did not work together on this project. It is my hope that the final project will meet the intent that Effie had, which is to pass on these stories to her grandchildren and all the other children that will follow. A lot of the experiences that Effie talked about from her early marriage, or even when she returned to the Yukon River after retirement, are no longer possible to experience. The caribou do not migrate in large herds to swim across the river, and the salmon runs are much smaller (sometimes only 10% of what there were years ago) and fishing is very controlled by Fish and Game.

I agree with Blackman that the genre of life histories holds a gift, definitely for family and people who knew Effie, but also for students in Tanana and in the Effie Kokrine Charter School in Fairbanks.⁴⁹ They will be able to read about Effie's life and

⁴⁸ Blackman, Margaret B. *During My Time: Florence Edenshaw Davidson, A Haida Woman*. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1982.

⁴⁹ The Effie Kokrine Charter School was created and named in honor of Effie after she passed away. The school blends Alaska Native culture and values with requirements of the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District. The school is on the Howard Luke Campus on Loftus Street, off of Geist Road. It is an early college high school, serving grades 7-12.

learn why her philosophy of hard work and determination made her a role model for younger people. A thirty minute DVD about Effie will be available as a companion resource, and possibly a flash drive with additional photos. There was not space in the thesis to include all desired pictures, but the pictures are an enjoyable historic reference and add richness to the text, so I felt strongly about including them.

One of the most valuable lessons that I learned in my studies was a quote I read in Bill's Oral History class: Every time an Elder dies, it is like a library burning down.⁵⁰ You are not able to touch that resource again, you are not able to clarify a statement or ask that precious resource for further detail. I miss being able to ask my mother about who is related to whom, how to make something, or what she remembers about a specific thing I learned. In listening to these recordings, it is rather easy to realize that her generation of knowledge is rapidly vanishing. Young people who want to learn from "wisdom bearers" are finding fewer traditional teachers. The newspaper obituaries are filled every year with libraries of knowledge that we will no longer be able to tap in to. The tapes that Effie left in preparation for the book that she hoped to complete while she was still alive are a true gift - to her progeny, all of her friends, and to people who are only just starting to learn of Denakke's knowledge. We have to be thankful for the technology that allows us to keep these precious voices alive. Gone are the days when Elders pass on knowledge at the end of the day around fat-fueled lanterns.

One more thought about content: this is Effie's story, her history. If there are incorrect recollections, it is not my job to change them. Effie recorded many of these tapes from when she was in her 70s until she passed away four months before her 83rd birthday. They were her memories.

To clarify family structure I have created a kinship chart, Chapter 2. I used two secondary sources for information that I did not find myself. William Whalley of Camas, Washington has done extensive research on the family of Gregory Kokrine who was the grandfather of Andrew Kokrine, Jr. I used his research to identify the mother of Andrew Kokrine, Sr. Gregory Kokrine had three Alaska Native wives, most had indigenous

⁵⁰ That quote is paraphrased. In an internet search for the origins of the quote, BookBrowse identified it as an old African proverb, "When an old man dies, a library burns to the ground."

names and Anglo names. William Whalley spent considerable time sorting out family lines, using records of the Catholic and Episcopal Churches, and the writing of Father Jules Jette'. I also contacted Miranda Wright, Director of the Department of Alaska Native Studies and Rural Development at UAF for information on the Antoski family, formerly of Nulato. Miranda had access to records of the Catholic Church from her research. Both of these sources saved me the time that it would have taken to gain access to those records, which I would like to review at a later date for more complete

Chapter 2 Effie's Family History

2.1 Introduction

The lure of gold brought many hopeful people into Interior Alaska at the end of the nineteenth century. Gold had been discovered in the Klondike, Juneau, and several other places in Alaska. Gold seekers entered Alaska hoping to strike it rich, although most did not. Many miners worked hard for just enough gold to keep them hoping for a big strike. For the most part they were a pretty tough group, traveling up and down the Yukon River and tributaries with just enough equipment to set up a camp and run dirt, gravel and water through a shaker box. They carried their tents, sleeping gear, food and hunting supplies, often traveling by boat in the summer, and snowshoes and dog teams (if they were fortunate enough to put together a dog team) in the winter. Many of these gold seekers established relationships with Native people throughout the Interior, as they found that good relations were beneficial for trade of knowledge and goods. The great influx of outsiders brought items that made life easier for the Native people: guns, cooking supplies, matches, fabric and food. Native people quickly started to depend on tea, coffee, flour, rice, beans and spices to supplement their subsistence diets. The white people who entered Alaska appreciated the Native people's knowledge of the land, rivers and technology, including clothing and modes of transportation that allowed them to move through the country in extreme conditions. The relationships were mutually beneficial, and eventually the outsiders started to marry into Native families.

Both of Effie's grandmothers had white husbands, and both of her parents were offspring of these marriages. Both of the men had come into Alaska looking for adventure and gold, and both ended up staying for the rest of their lives, unlike many of the gold seekers who left Alaska for good when they had enough, one way or another.

Effie's maternal grandmother, Selena, is thought to have come from around the Yukon Flats area. That is what Effie had been told. It is difficult to trace the genealogy of Native people, as there were no written records until churches started recording births and marriages. Added to the lack of written records is the fact that Native people at that time were born with Native names, which were changed to western names around the

same time as the records were being developed. With the language shift from indigenous languages to English a great deal of history was lost as Elders passed away, taking their historical knowledge with them.



Figs. 2.1.1 John Folger, Sr.

Fig. 2.1.2 James Huntington

Census records show a couple of different years of birth for Selena, along with several different spellings of her name, most likely attributable to a lack of communication with census recorders. The 1910 records from Fort Gibbon show Selena as married to William C. Murray, who was born in 1870. Selena's birthday was listed as 1884 or 1885. The 1910 census showed that Selena had a daughter named Jessie, who was eight years old, born in 1901. Jessie was the birth daughter of James Huntington, who lived with Selena and had two daughters. The younger daughter died at a very young age. Jessie was the mother of Effie. Effie was Jessie's first daughter.

According to Effie, James Huntington ran into trouble with the Marshall for giving alcohol to a Native man, which was against the law. He left the area for several years, and when he returned, Selena was married to Murray. Huntington married another Native woman and raised a family that continues to thrive in Alaska. That family included sons Sidney and Jimmy Huntington, who grew to be very well-known and well-

respected men. I know of no other relatives of Selena. I have never heard stories of other family members.

In the 1920 census, Selena's name was recorded as Celina, with the birth year listed as 1875. By then she was divorced from William Murray and was living with John, Jr., and Jessie Folger. Selena later married a man with the last name of Edleman. I did find a record of Frank Edelman in the 1920 census, born in 1879. He was from Indiana and was a couple of years younger than Selena. Selena's grave on Mission Hill reads "Selena Edleman, 1884-1938. That graveyard above the Yukon River is still in use and has many old graves that are losing their markers to age and weather.

There is more known of the paternal side of Effie's family. Her grandfather was John Folger (Sr.), a German from Pennsylvania,¹ who first came to the Tanana area in 1887. He was a gold seeker who actually did make some money. Often, for the miners, money made was spent on trips outside of Alaska to visit family and new equipment stores upon return to Alaska. The book *Sourdough Sagas*² told colorful stories of when the miners got together. They often enjoyed music, they had dances when there were women present, or they played poker. The poker games could be high stakes, and there were stories of individuals losing \$20 to \$100 or more in a single night.

An article in the *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, dated June 15, 1928, stated that John Folger was "one of the first white men to come into what is now the Fairbanks district. Folger held ground on Tenderfoot in the early days and sold his holdings for \$30,000. Later he prospected in all parts of the country, recently in the Kantishna."

Michael Carey, historic writer for the *Anchorage Daily News*, wrote:

Folger was of the breed of white men who had seen Interior Alaska before the great gold strikes of the Klondike. He arrived on the Yukon River in 1882, a lone miner with a pick and pan. He eventually shared campfires with Jack McQuesten, Arthur Harper and Al Mayo – true pioneer prospectors. His trail led from the Fortymile, on the Canadian

¹ Census data, 1910, listed John Folger as a single man, 59 years of age. 1930 census data listed his age as 70, which is the age that was identified at his time of death in 1931.

² Heller, Herbert L. ed. *Alaska 1883-1923 Sourdough Sagas*. Sausalito: Comstock Editions, 1967.

border, to Nulato and the Iditarod country. In 1893, he was one of the discoverers of Tramway Bar, between Bettles and Wiseman, the first significant gold find on the Koyukuk River.

Folger came to trapping late, around 1919, after World War I pushed up fur prices. His trap line on the Kantishna originally belonged to Carl Nigel, a German national arrested after Uncle Sam declared war on the Kaiser. The U.S. marshal in Fairbanks became convinced Nigel was a security menace and had him interned Outside.³

Rosalie L'Ecuyer, Instructor of History at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, wrote:

John Folger moved into the camp (Rampart) the summer of 1897. He had lot 0, block 2, next to Al Mayo's Store. His wife Lucy Folger held lot 0, block A. That fall Folger helped organize the Chapman Creek Mining District. John Folger had discovered Tramway Bar the previous February. Folger located his twenty-acre Discovery placer claim on Tramway Bar on 23 February 1893 (also given 24 February, 1894). He described the site as being on the right bank of the Middle Fork of the Koyukuk River about 110 miles from Arctic City and one mile below the mouth of Chapman Creek.⁴

In the book *Sourdough Sagas*, Folger is mentioned as being in the Fortymile area, on the Tanana River, on the Koyukuk River and in Kantishna, where he lived and trapped at the end of his life. In the 1930 census John Folger is registered as a 70-year-old fur trapper, who was working with his son, William, age 31, in the Kantishna River area.⁵ John Folger was married to Lucy Henry, whom he had met while mining around Cos Jacket, on the Tanana River. Lucy was being raised by an older blind woman and lacked

³ Michael Carey. "John Folger and Carl Hult: partners to the last mile." *Anchorage Daily News*, Sunday July 25, 1999, sec. G, page 4.

⁴ L'Ecuyer, Rosalie E. Prospecting and Mining Activity in the Rampart, Manley Hot Springs and Fort Gibbon Mining Districts of Alaska, 1884 to the Present Era. Fairbanks, Alaska. U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, Northern District. BLM-Alaska Open File Report 61. February 1997. Pages 12, 24, 38.

⁵ "Uncle Willie" Folger lived in Tanana until his death in 1985, at the age of 88 or 89.

discipline and ran wild.⁶ Together John and Lucy had two sons. William was the younger brother of John Folger, Jr., Effie's father. Census information shows that John Folger, Jr., was born in 1890, and William (Willie) was born in 1896. John Folger, Sr., left his family to return to mining.⁷ Lucy kept Willie, who was described as a spoiled child, and gave John, Jr. (Johnny), to her brother, Peter Henry and his wife, who were childless. Peter Henry was a hard working person, and young Johnny was ambitious and learned to work hard. He learned to sew, to cook, to take care of meat and be generally helpful. The Henrys also adopted another boy.

Johnny was considered and called a "half-breed." Half-breeds did not fit in well in either the white or Native culture. They were looked down upon, according to Effie's notes, and did not really belong in either the town or the village (Fort Gibbon or Tanana). When John was in his twenties, his family started looking for a wife for him. A good choice was Jessie Murray, another "half-breed."⁸



Fig. 2.1.3 John and Jessie Folger

⁶ Information in this paragraph is from an audio tape recorded by Effie Kokrine. 1900 census information identified Lucy's mother as Marie, who was living with Lucy and her two sons, ages 8 and 2 at St. James Mission in Tanana. In the 1900 census Lucy's age was 25 and Marie's age was 45. People traveled from camp to the village, so they might be in different locations when it was time for the census. In 1920, the Folger family was recorded both in Tanana and in Kantishna, two months apart by different recorders.

⁷ Census information was garnered from Ancestry.com

⁸ Unpublished notes written by Effie Kokrine. John and Jessie may have been born earlier than a lot of mixed heritage offspring to have such scrutiny.

From the age of twelve to around sixteen, Jessie lived with a store-owner and his family in Fort Gibbon, where she became more used to doing things the “white” way. She was the baby-sitter to the children of the Vachons.⁹ While living with the Vachons, Jessie met Henry Kokrine, the oldest son of Mary and Andrew Kokrine. They fell in love and wanted to be married. Jessie had been raised in the Native village as an Episcopalian, and Henry was a Catholic. In those days the two religions were not allowed to inter-marry, so they were denied. So rather than marry the first man whom she loved, Jessie married John Folger, Jr., who was ten years her senior. He taught her to sew and other Native skills that she did not know how to do. He was kind to her and they grew to love each other. They had seven (or nine) children together:

Arthur, born around 1916, died by accidental shooting at a young age
 Effie, born 3-23-1919, died 11-02-2001
 Irene (Lester), born 11-3-1920, died 8-25-1983
 Roy, born 8-20-1925 (only surviving sibling)
 Isabel (Svoboda), born 10-31-1927, died 3-27-2001
 Frank (may have been named John Frank), born 9-10-1929, died 1-27-1990
 Elsie (Flanagan), born 10-10-1930, died 2008¹⁰

Life was forever altered for the family of John Folger, Jr., when he became a witness in a trial held in Fairbanks in 1931. Two men, Rex Greenway and Herbert Mokler, were accused of stealing \$4,200 of government property from an old building at Fort Gibbon that was being used as a warehouse. By this time Fort Gibbon had been shut down. Once thriving, it had served as one of the Army forts established across Alaska, with the mission of providing law and order to the territory. It also was a station of the Alaska Military Cable and Telegraph System, helping to maintain the telegraph line

⁹ 1910 census data shows Andrew G. Vachon as head of household, age 28. Others in the house were his wife Annie M. Vachon, age 30, Peter Vachon, age 2/12, Joe Matsumura, 33, and Martha Galbraith, 35. This would have been 2-3 years before Jessie moved in with the Vachons, who were French Canadian. 1920 census records show Andrew Vachon at age 36, Anna Vachon, age 35, Lawrence P. Vachon, age 10 and Elizabeth Vachon, age 6 and Andrew Vachon, age 3/12. There is no mention of Peter, who must have died, or perhaps Lawrence P. was called Peter in 1910. There are inconsistencies in data. By the 1930 census, Andrew Vachon, age 44, was the only person mentioned in household. Subsequent perusal of the *Fairbanks Daily News Miner* (Tanana News column), 6-13-30, shows Peter watching the store while his father took a trip up the Yukon River.

between Fairbanks and Nome, and later became a wireless station. Fort Gibbon was home to white settlers, soldiers and merchants. Buildings generally remained on-site until they were dismantled or moved. The building in question was burned, and the body of another man, one Leo Blistine, who was an accomplice of Greenway and Mokler, was found in the ruins. The trial of Rex Greenway and Herbert Mokler was scheduled in Fairbanks, and John was subpoenaed to be a witness.¹¹ He did not want to come in to Fairbanks and was concerned about his safety.

The first trial of Greenway and Mokler ended in a hung jury. A second trial was scheduled. John Folger was summonsed, and pilot Joe Crosson¹² was dispatched to Tanana to pick up Folger and bring him to Fairbanks to testify. The trial was reported in the *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, identifying John as the principal witness. On a Saturday morning during the trial John Folger was found dead 1.5 miles out of Fairbanks on the Richardson Highway. He had died of a .22 caliber gunshot wound. An inquest that same afternoon determined that he had committed suicide so he would not have to testify further. A man named Lee Mayo stated that he had loaned John a rifle so he could shoot some ptarmigan that he had seen. He allegedly borrowed the gun at 8:30 a.m. and was found by a farmer driving a horse cart around 9:30. The gun was 20-25 feet away, and there was a trail of blood between him and the gun. There was no further investigation. Effie was eleven years old when her father died. She never believed that her father would commit suicide and leave their family without a husband and father. Life was extremely difficult for a single woman with children.

Since Effie was the oldest girl she helped her mother with household chores and tended to the younger children. That first year without John, rather than go to their usual summer camp on the Tanana River to put up fish, they spent the summer with Charles

¹⁰ Aunt Elsie Flanagan told me that there were two other daughters named Eleanor and Jessie. I had not heard of them previously and do not know where they were in birth order. There are five years between Irene and Roy, so they might have been born during those years.

¹¹ *Fairbanks News Miner*, "Second Arrest Made at Tanana," October 3, 1930. Other news articles related have to be rediscovered, as they are not in the Rasmuson Library data-base. I could not find specific information why John Folger was called as a witness.

¹² *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, Looking Back, 75 Years, unable to locate. The life of Joe Crosson was chronicled by Dirk Tordoff, MA thesis, Northern Studies Program, UAF, and later published as a book.

and Nettie¹³ Erhart and their children at their camp at Eightmile Island.¹⁴ Nettie and Charles had a daughter named Elizabeth. Effie and Elizabeth were close to the same age and were good friends. Elizabeth and Effie ended up traveling to Eklutna Vocational School together, as told by Effie in Chapter 3.



Fig. 2.1.4 Effie with Sister, Irene, Before Eklutna

Effie did not know that she would not return for three years. When she did return she found that her mother had married again. Her husband was Sam Joseph, a widower who had already lost two wives and had children from those marriages. When Effie returned to Tanana her mother had one or two new children with Joseph. She had difficulty fitting into the blended family, particularly since her mother was very strict with her and did not allow Effie to socialize much. Effie does not talk about her relationship with her mother very much, nor does she talk about her step-siblings. Life

¹³ Nettie Erhart was my God-mother, although I never knew Nettie Erhart, as the Kokrine family had moved to Fairbanks before I was born, and I only remember meeting her once.

¹⁴ In Effie's recordings, she stated that the Folgers always had old people staying with them. That year John's mother, Lucy, and her husband, Old Moses, were staying with them.

at home with her expanded family lasted an estimated sixteen months. Effie turned sixteen in March and married Andrew in October. Effie talked about her marriage in Chapter 4.

Effie did not go into great detail about family dynamics. She may have planned to fill in details at a later time but passed away before she could complete her story. I believe that it is important to include the stories that she intended to share and not expand too much on areas that were not covered. There is plenty of content without expanding too much. So, here we start with Effie's thoughts about how she wanted her story told.

2.2 Those Who Came Before

When Effie was thinking about how she wanted to start her book, she started a recording with the following story, which transitioned into her telling about her parents and grand-parents:

A long time ago, when I was working at the Rural Human Services¹⁵ we were talking during a break about stories and about our lives. I was telling those girls that I had a story I wanted to find out about. I wasn't sure about it, and I didn't know how true it was. I told the girls a story about these people that were living on the Yukon River.

2.3 Story About a Girl and a Wild Man

It was in the fall-time when all the girls used to go out picking berries. They always stayed close together and kept an eye on each other, but somehow this young woman got separated from the others.

In those days they used to believe in Wild Men, Medicine People, and they had a lot of superstitions. This girl got separated, and she was captured by a man that was very powerful. He took her, and he must have hypnotized

¹⁵ Rural Human Services is a program developed and administered through the College of Rural and Community Development. Elders are a vital part of program design, mentoring and guiding students.

her somehow because she didn't cry for help or anything. He carried her off, running very fast, and she just let him. When she came to and got herself balanced out, she started to take notice of what was going on and paid attention to which direction they were going. She looked towards her right and there was a river. It was flowing downriver, so she knew that they were going east, up the river. The man must have put her down, and she started walking with him. He must have had some kind of control over her. She was following him, or maybe he was holding onto her.

They went for many days up that same direction. Pretty soon they came to a little settlement where there were other people. They were all different people, but she noticed that there were men and women.

She started living with this man, because she had no choice. I don't know whether they talked the same language or not. She was living with the man and she started working and preparing food like women always did.

When they would go out, they would get wood. People would never go to bathroom out in the woods without bringing a little wood home for the woodpile. The young woman always went downriver whenever she left the settlement.

It turned into winter, and she stayed there all winter. The next spring she was still with him, and she was pregnant by that time. She started to think about how she could get back home. She was starting to get worried because she didn't want to bear a child alone up there.

Towards the fall-time, when the ground was dry and it was nice traveling, she would follow along the riverbank. She started planning her escape. She took a little dry meat when she went down towards the river to carry wood. She cached this dry meat, or dry fish, in a bag. Every time she walk down there she added a little more to it until she thought she had enough to carry her for a while. Then, it was Fall-time and the men went out hunting. She planned her escape for when those men were gone.

One morning she took off and she picked up her cached bag and started down the river. She traveled and traveled. In the daytime, when she was scared they might find her, she used to hide under a tree and covered herself with leaves or crawled under the bank if she was near the river, and stayed hidden. Then come night time, she started traveling down the river again. It's hard to tell how long she walked. And she walked for days, and kept eating this dry meat and dry fish.

When she thought she was safe, she started to travel in the daytime, and she finally came back to where she was from, and everybody was so happy to see her. She told them about her experience and that she was pregnant. They just welcomed her back. When she finally had this baby, it was fair, not full-blooded Native and the eyes were light-colored. In those days, they didn't say blue eyes, they just said white eyes. This baby was born with white eyes, but they welcomed him anyway. This child grew up and he had a family.

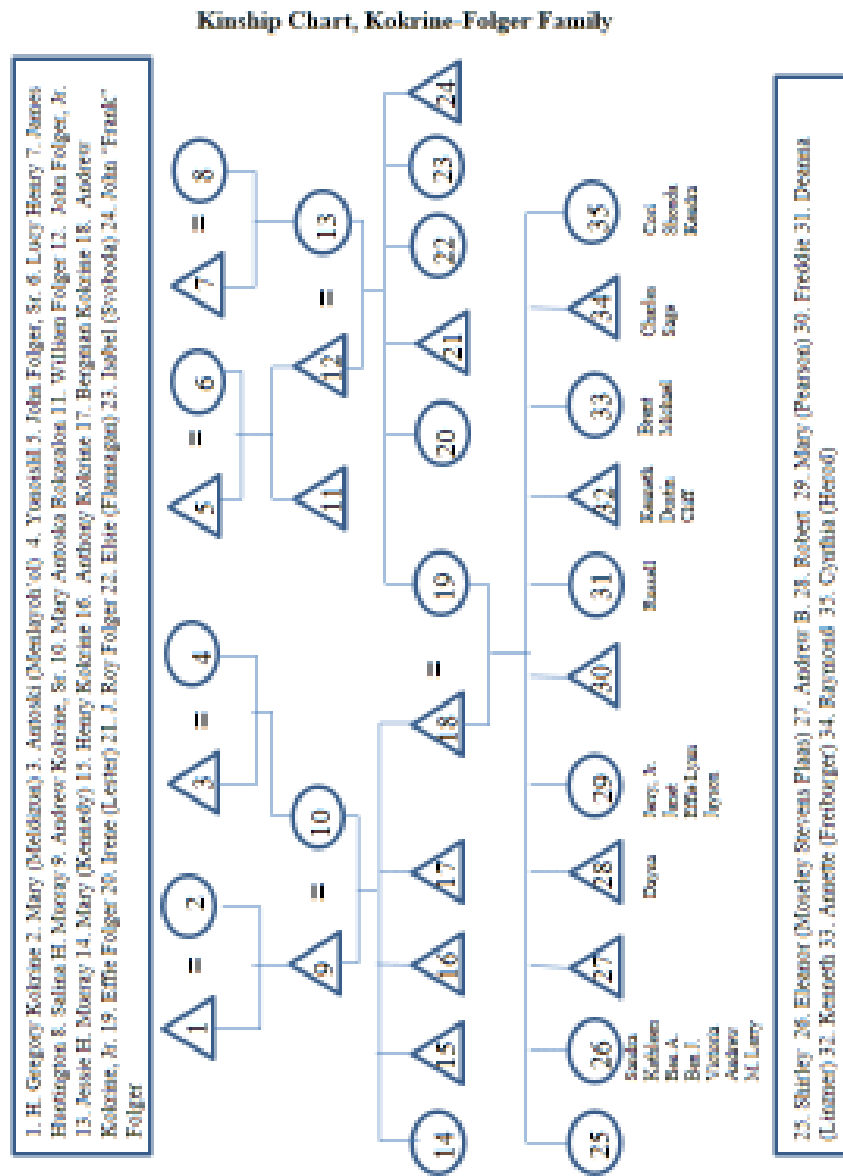


Fig. 2.1.5 Kinship Chart Developed by Annette Freiburger

2.4 Effie's Predecessors

About two generations back my grandmother, Selena (she was going by a Native name then, but I don't remember what her Native name was), was born and she had fair skin. I do not know if she had any sisters or brothers. People used to travel a lot those days because they were making a living off the country. It was said that she came from the Fort Yukon area and ended up down around Tanana.

When she was a young woman, she got a boyfriend, a white man. He was a prospector named James Huntington. She started living with him. Then my mother, Jessie, was born.¹⁶ They had another girl, but she died. When my mother was about two years old, Huntington got into a little trouble with the Marshalls, so he took off and went towards Canada. My grandmother was left alone with her baby.

Selena started to stay with a guy named Murray,¹⁷ who had a camp on an Island¹⁸ in the Tanana River. In the meantime, the people from Nenana, the preachers and census (or whatever they call it), started traveling down the rivers, and they were marrying people.¹⁹ Before that people just lived together as the common law. There was no law. If people lived together, they respected that as a marriage.

So when those people were traveling down the river they start naming people and then marrying people, and if there's babies, they were baptizing babies and giving them

¹⁶ The 1910 Census shows that Selena was born in either 1884 or 1885, and Jessie was born in 1901. The 1920 Census recorded that Selena was born in 1875. The earlier date is probably more accurate.

¹⁷ 1920 Census information records William C. Murray as Selena's husband, born 1870.

¹⁸ Murray Island is below Cos Jacket, on the Tanana River. Cos Jacket is sometimes identified as Cross Jacket.

Christian names. So, when she married Murray, she gave my mother to a woman named Lucy that could not have children. And so, my mother was given away at the age of two. And so my grandmother was free to start her life again with Murray.

After two years Huntington came back, but he found out that my grandmother was married already, so he just went on down the river. That's where he met his other wife, and Sidney, Jim and all of them were born.²⁰ In the meantime, they come back to upriver. My mother was a young girl by then. When she was twelve years old and she went and started babysitting for Andy Vachon, the storekeeper, who had a couple of kids. She babysat these two kids from the age of 12-16, so she never learned much about the Native ways of doing things, she just know how to do the white man's way.

¹⁹ Either government officials or church officials performed ceremonies.

²⁰ Sidney, Jimmy, Elsie and Marion Huntington. Effie had a very close relationship with them.



Fig. 2.4.1 Andy Vachon, Front of Store with Grant Family, Richard Frank Collection, UAF 1973-71-9, Archives, Alaska and Polar Regions Collection, University of Alaska Fairbanks

Ten years before that (prior to my mother being born) another white prospector met my other grandmother, Lucy Henry. That's another Lucy. In those days, when they were giving out names, I guess it was a popular name to label people with, so there are a lot of Lucys and Rosies and names like that. My grandmother Lucy was being raised by a blind woman. In those days, people just raised kids...if one family had too many children, or if they're widowed, or those kids are orphaned...they're given to people that could afford to feed them.

My grandmother sort of ran wild. She didn't have no discipline except from this blind woman. She started going with my grandfather, a white man named was Johnny Folger. So they started living together. My father was born in 1880, and my mother was born in 1900.²¹ And so, when my father was born, they stayed together for a while and then when my Uncle Willy²² was born, old Johnny Folger was getting restless, he wanted to get out and go prospecting and stuff, and he didn't want married life. In the meantime, he was getting letters from his folks down in the states, and they ask him to *not* get involved with Indians and Eskimos because they'll only want his money. Well, in those days, people didn't care about money. All they cared about was putting food on the table and fixing up their furs, and moose skins and stuff, so they'll have something to wear and something to eat. Money didn't mean that much because people were not used to eating out of the stores.

My grandfather had the bug to go mining again, and so he left. My grandmother kept Willy because he was a spoiled child. My father was very ambitious. He was working all the time doing something, so his uncle, Lucy's brother,²³ took my father. He took my father, but he never changed his name, he just kept him.

My father grew up working hard and being helpful. This Peter Henry's wife did not have children. So, my father was the oldest and done all the work that he can. He learn how to sew. In the evenings, he watched his

²¹ Census information indicates that John Folger, Jr. was born closer to 1890 or 1891.

²² William Folger, younger brother to John Folger, Jr.

²³ Peter Henry

grandma sewing. He learned how to cook, and he learned how to take care of meat, and was an all-around helpful boy. In the meantime, Peter Henry and them adopted another boy.

When my father got big he was labeled a "half-breed." In those days, the half-breeds were not very welcome. They were looked down upon, and so they didn't fit in with the Native people and they did not fit in with the white people. They were considered, just like you would treat a complete orphan. My mother was also a half-breed, and when my father got in his twenties, they were starting to look for a wife for him.

My mother in the meantime was turning sixteen, and she was still staying in town.²⁴ The town was divided up into white people's town, and three miles upriver was the Native Village. At the Native Village was the Episcopal Church. Native people belonged in the village, and the white people belonged in the town. The only time the Native people came to town was to go to a store or something.

So, my mother met Henry Kokrine, and they fell in love. Henry Kokrine was the oldest son of Andrew and Mary Kokrine. In those days all the town people were in the Catholic Church; all the Mission people were Episcopal. My grandmother was Episcopal, and Henry was a Catholic. So people said (that's the excuse I guess), "Oh no, you can't marry into mixed religion, you have to stay with your own kind."

When they decided my mother was old enough to get married, they took her back from Vachon and they went back

²⁴ The town was Tanana/Fort Gibbon, which had grown to be a fairly large town, an important location for trade and commerce on the Yukon River, across from the mouth of the Tanana River.

to Cos Jacket. That's where they were living. She was given to my father. My father was ten years older than her. My mother was a half-breed, and my father was a half-breed. They gave these two half-breeds to each other because they didn't really fit in no place, in respect of the town, but they were good enough to be like the servant around the house.²⁵

So my father married my mother. She didn't really know how to cook, prepare food, and sew clothes. My father used to help her. He showed her how to sew, just general, not real good, but enough to make clothes. And he taught my mother a lot of things. They had a little boy, and the second child was me. I was their second child.

When my mother was waiting to have me, my grandmother was living in the town part, she wasn't living in the Indian village. My grandmother had a boyfriend down on the town side, so my mother was staying with them.

The storekeeper of the Northern Commercial Company asked her, "Could you come over and cook supper for me?" Instead of just waiting, doing nothing, she said, "Sure." So every day she used to go over and cook supper for him. He was a guy that took pictures. In those days, nobody knew how to take pictures. He took pictures of her and of all the people, and everything that's going on around.

One day he asked my mother, "If you have a baby girl, could you name her Effie?" He said, "I have a dear auntie over in the Old Country." He said, "I'll never have

²⁵ I do not know where Effie got this opinion, but I assume that she heard it from her mother. It was, presumably, a marriage arranged by their parents.

children, but I want that name to be carried on. If you have a baby girl, could you please name her Effie?"

My mother thought about it, and then when I was born, they just automatically named me Effie, and I am very proud of that name because that name was given to me with love. Love for an old lady, and I was very proud of it. I did not make fun of my name, even though it was different, it was odd. I was the only Effie around in that place. A lot of people, when we were kids used to say, "Oh, I don't like my name" and everything, but I was always proud of my name because that's the name my mother chose for me.

When I was born, I was born in a little log cabin, with just my grandmother helping my mother. I was born on a Sunday morning, in Fort Gibbon, right below Tanana. Really, they weren't separated, with Tanana running right into Fort Gibbon. It was an Army post and the only doctor we had there at the time was the Army doctor.

My father went down to him and told him that I was born, and that he wanted the doctor to check me out, to see if I was OK. So the doctor came to our house and checked me out and made out my birth certificate, and he put me down as born in Fort Gibbon. I was really born in Tanana, but he just put Fort Gibbon down. My birth certificate says I was born in Fort Gibbon. Does anybody not know where that is? Where is that? Maybe I'm not even American. And so I always thought it was sort of cute. I still have the original birth certificate where the Commission wrote "Mr. and Mrs. Howard of Tanana. They were the Commissioners. And so I was very proud of that.

The day I was born was on a Sunday morning. My mother remembered hearing the Catholic Church bell ringing. In a little while, here comes somebody to the door. Everybody used to just come in, after they knock and you say "Come in." Here it was Mary Kokrine, and she was a Catholic, on her way to church.

In those days, people used to snuff. They didn't smoke cigarettes like people do now...they just used to snuff. She had snuff, but not much. She came in and she went to the stove and took out a little ashes that she mixed with her snuff. She snuffed, I guess, just like having a cigarette before going to church.²⁶

It's funny because Mary is the mother of Henry Kokrine, the oldest son she had, and she had a bunch of children. And later in life...her youngest son was Andrew Kokrine, and he's the man that I married. So, it's funny how the first person that came into the house after I was born was my future mother-in-law. Of course, I don't remember.

²⁶ I don't know why Effie included the information about the snuff. Her mother, Jessie, must have told her this story and Effie recounted it. Mary Kokrine was probably aware that the baby had arrived and stopped by to check on Jessie. The baby was delivered by Jessie's mother, Selena.



Fig. 2.4.2 Andrew and Mary Kokrine Family, Andrew, Jr. Left Front

2.5 A Story Shared with Effie from Her Mother, Jessie

This next transcript was from Effie reminiscing with Patty Elias once, when they were sitting up on the Mission Hill overlook, which is a very special place to sit and view both the Yukon River and the Tanana River. It is a beautiful setting, and a good place to evoke memories. Whenever she visited Tanana it was a treat to ride up the road and enjoy the view from the overlook. In this transcript she is talking about some of the practices used by her parents and grandparents, who worked and lived on the Tanana River and in Tanana. I placed this particular story here to show some of the activities that the family participated in to provide a glimpse of life and activities at that time.

Patty loves to hear the stories of the old times. She loves to hear all the things that I could tell her about different things. So I started to tell her what my mother told me one time about when she was a young girl, right after my father and her got married.

People didn't have motor boats back then, they just had poling boats, or canoes. Large canoes are called peter-bars.²⁷

My father had to go up the Rapids for something, probably took some freight up there for somebody²⁸. My father was always doing things for other people and helping people. He probably didn't even get paid for it. They probably just gave him a fish. That's the way they used to do a long time ago. Somebody would do something for you, and you give him fresh meat or fresh fish or something. There was never any money involved. So, my mother said my father had to go up there, and he had a little poling boat. She went with him. I guess my father must've known what he was gonna do, because he took five dogs with him, and the harness and the line. They left town and they were gonna go up the Yukon River.

The rope was one-quarter inch rope. You tied it about five or six feet from the bow. On the left-hand side, you secured it to the inside of the boat. While the boat was still tied on the beach, he would connect the rope to the tow line, where he fastened the five dog harnesses. Then he'd hook up the dogs after the boat was all ready to go.

²⁷ I could not find a definition of a peter bar, however, dictionaries define a peter boat as a small double ended boat used for ferrying or fishing, approximately twelve feet long.

The dogs used to mind pretty good, because they were work dogs and they understood what the man wanted.

My father got in the boat, back at the steering wheel, and got the paddle ready for steering the boat. He pushed the boat out from the beach, and he got out a little ways and he told the dogs, "Go." All the dogs started pulling the rope, and they kept trotting, a fast trot, all the way up. It was just like they would pull a sled. They just kept pulling on the rope, and they kept a-going up. My father would steer the boat, and they went as fast as the dogs could trot. When there was a stick or something on the beach where the rope could get caught, my father would holler to the leader, and she'd jump in the river and walk or swim round the stick and avoid getting snagged. For a big rock, she'd do the same.

They went on up the river. The beach is mostly gravel and it's easy to go. Then further on, there was bluff. I would just roughly guess it's about twenty miles. I'm not very good on miles, even if I heard it many times. There was a big bluff there, so he landed the boat. And I suppose they stopped and made tea. You know, you have to stop and rest sometime, because while steering the boat, you have to stay in one position all the time.

So they stopped at the bluff, and he untied the dogs. He got in the boat again, and he started to row around this bluff. The dogs watched him, and they knew that he's gonna go, so they went up above the bluff, went around into the brushes, and came out above the bluff and went down on the

²⁸ The (Rampart) Rapids is a section of the Yukon River upriver from Tanana. It is a traditional place for many families to set up fish camps and still a popular place to fish.

beach again on the other side. Then my daddy was rowing, and my mother was there, and they rowed around the bluff. They stopped and hooked up the dogs again and kept a-going until they come to another bluff.

This was called the Hunter's Eddy and they done the same thing there, and that's a big rock. They called it Hunter's Eddy because of a guy that used to be there. People used to fish there for years and years. But at the time, it got the name of this one guy.

They started to paddle around the bluff again, and again he turned the dogs loose. This time it was a higher bluff, and bigger. He just went ahead and rowed the boat, and sure enough the dogs went back in the woods and they came out on the other side.

My father rowed around the bluff and landed there, and then hooked up the dogs again, and they kept a-goin'. And my mother said that when they got close to Rapids, a lot of people camped along there, and they all stayed in tents in the summer-time. There were tents and fish racks and stuff.

My mother said there were no fish wheels in those days. That was before they started to make fish wheels. But a lot of people had fish nets. Not very large fish nets, either, because the women had to make the fish net. They had to knit the net, and put a rope all around the net, and make floaters for the net out of cottonwood bark. For the sinkers, they used to find rocks about five or six inches long - oblong. They'd have to hunt for special kind of rock, and they'd sew canvas or something around it, make a little pouch like a bean bag. They'd sew the rocks to

the bottom of the fish net for sinkers. Then they'd set their net.

The people that didn't have nets used to, a lot of the time, fish with a dip net. She said there was a lot of short-handled dip nets all around.

I remember when I was small, I used to see some of them short handled dip nets. Now I'm only used to seeing the long handle, like we use on the Tanana River to dip fish with. So I asked my mother why they had short handles. She said, a long time ago, when they didn't have motor boats, they didn't have big boats, men used to go fishing and dip. Not from the beach like we do, not like they do in Chitina²⁹ now, where you dip with a long handled dipnet.

They would float down in a canoe and dip the net in. A man would never go alone. He's always got to have somebody with him, or maybe a group of people go out together. Because when you catch a fish, somebody would say, "I got one," or something. Then they all come and help, because they're trying to put a big fish in a canoe, with the fish squirming and fighting. A King Salmon - about three to four feet long, are very heavy. They average from 10-15-20-30 pounds...35, if it's a big fish. Well, they could tip a man over, so they put three canoes together, and they put the fish in the canoe that way, and then they hit it on the head. Then they'd continue fishing.

So that's why people had short handles on the dipnet, just enough to handle from the canoe.

²⁹ Chitina is a popular site for fishing for red sockeye salmon. Alaskan fishers flock there every summer to dip salmon with long net poles out of the Copper River. Copper River reds are a favored delicacy.

She said that when they were ready to go back down the river, they just put the five dogs in the boat and just floated down the river.

2.6 Reminiscing About Life on the Yukon

You know, to float down the river is really a gift that is just beautiful. When we lived up on the Yukon River, we used to go up and make a raft in the fall-time and float down. It was a very special time of year. We picked a day when it was not windy, because you can't travel in the raft when there's wind.

During the summer they used to make little smokehouses and put birch bark for the roof. They layered it, just like you would a brick roof, over-lapped it, and it was water tight. In those days they didn't have no plastic sheets like they do now for a tarp, and they didn't have no tin to put over the smokehouse.

Birch bark is very light and you could put it on top of a little smokehouse or even a big smokehouse and it won't be heavy. They do that with spruce bark, too, except spruce bark is heavy, so they usually put it around the bottom of the smokehouse to keep out the dampness in the evening. Everything is done by Nature, what we could get from the country.

Getting back to the story of building a raft, when a person peeled the spruce, they peeled it about four or five feet high. Each log that a man peeled, that's marked as his, when he's ready to cut it down in a couple years, when it's dried. It will kill the spruce, so it will dry out real good. And the next year, when they want to build a raft, they'll cut those trees down, and they'll put it down

on the bottom. Then they would get some good drift logs from around the beach. In the spring-time, when the water's high there's a lot of drift wood come down the river, and people catch the dry driftwood, or else just go along the beach and hunt for it. It's another activity that's very enjoyable. Everybody just goes out there and has a good time cutting wood. Then they'd build a raft.

In the meantime, the men would go hunting up in the mountains, and if they killed a caribou, they'll bring the skins down for the parkys to be made for winter. They would save the leggings for the boots. If they got a really big caribou, they could use the skin for a mattress. A medium sized caribou skin would be for an adult parky. If they killed a calf, they'd save that skin for the children's wear, because that one is light and it's just right to make a child's parky out of. They'd always be doing something, preparing for the future. When they would get a caribou, they got the caribou skin and the caribou meat. They might even get a moose, which in those days were not as plentiful as they are now on the Yukon River.

When it was time to pack up camp, you had to get all ready. You would bale your dog salmon, and put it one spot. Then all your eating fish, you would bale it up and put it on one side. Then you would load up the boat.

If it was a good day, then you would take your tent down and put all the kids and your belongings on the raft and then you'd push off and you'd float down to Tanana.

Just imagine how beautiful, how nice it used to be to do that!

When you'd get down to Tanana, you'd take the dogs off, then you take care of your meat. The raft, you could just leave there on the beach for a while. In the fall-time when the water would go down, without you even trying very hard the raft will be on dry ground. If you have the time then, you could take the raft apart and cut it up into four foot logs and put it on the beach. Of course, it will have better chance to dry out, too. You would have wood for the winter, you would have your meat, and you'd have your fish, and you're all set.

If you wanted to go out for winter camp, then you'd start another cycle of hunting. But, I'm getting away from the fact that that's the story I told Patty up on the hillside.

Then she asked me, "Why don't you write your story? Why don't you write it down?"

"I can't, I don't have much to say. I don't have no..." And Patty said, "Sure you have."

It took me a long time, at least ten - fifteen years before I decided to do this.

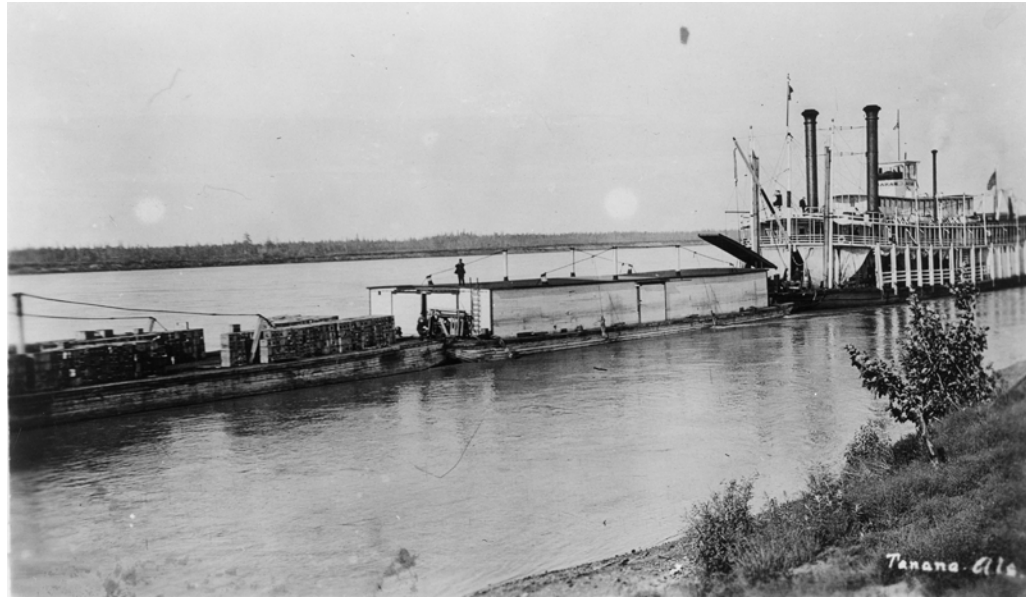


Fig. 2.6.1 Sternwheeler Pushing Barges of Goods Up the Yukon
 Richard Frank Collection, UAF-1997-122-43, Alaska and Polar Regions Collection
 University of Alaska Fairbanks



Fig. 2.6.2 Andrew's Boat With a Raft of Drums, Bob on Bow

Chapter 3 Effie's Early Years

3.1 Early Years on the Tanana River and Kantishna

Even as a little child I tried to do things. I was always trying to learn. I went from being a child to helping. I was always helpful. We learned how to wash dishes, as far back as I could remember.

One fall we moved up to the Kantishna River so that my father could visit with his father and spend the winter up that way. I remember one vision of the camp.¹ My mother was packing water in the fall-time, carrying a five gallon can of water. You know how it freezes in the fall-time with a little white on the grass, then it snowed on top of the grass. She was coming up the bank and she stepped on a piece of ice, and she fell down. I guess she must've knocked her vertebrae out of place or something. Anyway, she just barely made it to the house and laid down. We had a bed made up on the floor, so she laid there. She was nursing a baby at the time, so she just put the baby to her breast and us kids we were sort of left alone. Mrs. Duyck² was living at the same place. In those days you never asked for help, just because you would feel like you were being pampered. Anyway, my mother never said nothing. She just told us kids what to do, how to build a fire, how to put wood in the stove without dropping any charcoal or sparks on the floor, and how much wood to put in, how to adjust the damper on the stove. We knew how to boil water, and, of course, we could always get a little bucket, go

¹ The camp was discussed in the book *North to Wolf Country: My Life Among the Creatures of Alaska*, by James Brooks, who stayed in Folger's cabin and stated that you could see Denali from the cabin.

² There is a Duyck family that lives in Nenana that Effie was friends with. They are probably related.

down and get water. My father must have been out hunting or something, because he wasn't there for a couple days. My mother had some baked bread, and I think she had some cooked applesauce. We didn't have fresh fruit. All we had was dry fruit, and so us children just ate the bread and ate the fruit, and probably we had dry fish and stuff, and we learned how to take care of ourselves. Right there my mother decided she was gonna teach us how to take care of ourselves. So at a very young age we were able to keep a house going. We learned how to fix the fire and how to watch out for each other. We had a coal oil lamp. She told us to lift the chimney real gently and light the wick and put the chimney back on, so we weren't in total darkness in the fall-time. So we learned how to do things as early as I can remember. I was very lucky.

We were easy going children and we just done what we had to do. My mother was able to get out of bed later and do for herself. After that, she made us do as much as we can and were willing to do, and I was always willing to do everything. I was always eager to learn more. When they skinned animals or something, I was there watching and learning. Whatever they did, I was watching. That was a part that I remember most, just trying to be helpful to my mother.

One time I remember, I was about six years old. My father was cutting wood for some miners at Woodchopper. It's on the Tanana River, in back of American Creek.³ There was a mining camp there and those people needed wood. So

³ Woodchopper was a mining community off of the Tanana River. There was a mine at American Creek in the area as well.

my father and my grandmother's husband,⁴ we all moved back into the woods, and my father started cutting wood and hauling it into town. My grandfather had a horse, and they hauled wood with the horse. My father was cutting wood; they didn't have a chainsaw in those days. They just had a crosscut saw, but I remember looking at a big pile of wood. Where they were cutting wood, frozen birch, there was a lot of rabbit tracks all over. So I learned about rabbits, and my brother and me trapped them. We tried to hunt. My brother didn't like me to follow him because he said I was too noisy.

That winter we stayed there 'til my father was through cutting wood, then we moved into Woodchopper itself. While we were there at camp, when people talked, us children always just sat and listened. We were living in tents or a little cabin, and we didn't have much to do, so we would eat our bread, and we listened.

I don't remember moving into town,⁵ but we moved into town when it got colder, and we started renting a cabin. We stayed there for a while. We were mischief kids, not nice kids all the time - we were mischief. My mother didn't correct us too much because we had the whole outdoors to play in. We had the sticks and the snow banks, and everything, so we were always entertaining ourselves. We never had toys, but we were happy children. We just knew how to entertain ourselves.

I remember, it was my birthday in March. This woman, Mrs. Hanson, became my mother's friend. She had one child,

⁴ I believe that Selena was married to William Murray.

⁵ They would have moved back to Tanana.

one boy. She baked me a cake and she had a birthday party, and she put a paper box up, out of our reach. She had strings hanging down. And she said, "Well, since it's your birthday, you pull the first string." She told me which string to pull, and I pulled that string. I pulled out material, like for a dress, and some candy. And oh, I was so proud! That's the first birthday present that I remember ever getting. And also the first birthday cake I remember getting.

All the kids took turns pulling a string out of the box and they all got candy, so it was very big celebration. I have a picture of that day someplace...I don't know if I could find it or not.⁶ So, that was the beginning of my seventh year, where I started remembering.

We went back onto the river again, and I don't remember any more until fall-time. It was fall-time, and we started school; they told me that I was old enough to start school.



Fig. 3.1.1 Effie, far right, with Children on the Bank of the Yukon

⁶ I went through hundreds of pictures in Effie's collection, and never saw a picture of this party.

My father and mother were making their living off of the country, either running the roadhouse⁷ or trapping. They couldn't stay in town, and I don't remember why my grandmother couldn't keep me. Anyway, they put me in the care of Mr. and Mrs. Fullerton at the Mission. The Mission had a little school where there was just a couple third graders, a couple second graders and a first grader. People generally didn't send their children to school at that time because they were all making their living out in the camps. So I started staying there for my first grade. It was exciting to me because, even though I was lonesome for my family. It was exciting to me to be around so many children. Even a handful of children were a lot to me. My mother bought me two new dresses, and, oh, I was just proud of them. They were both alike, with a little sailor collar, but they were different colors. I was so proud of my new dresses. I guess Mrs. Fullerton didn't like the look of the dresses, maybe too feminine. She cut the collar off and made it just a button up. So I had a dress that had no collar, just a button up, and I was very disappointed. I never said nothing, because you didn't criticize what adults did, but it hurt my feelings. But then, I wore pants a lot too because it was wintertime. So I forgot about that after a while. I remember they had two pups, and I used to spend a lot of time playing outdoors with those pups.

I had a little fur hat made out of muskrat, a little trapper's hat, and it was sort of cute. I got my picture taken with my father and I sitting on a woodpile, with me

⁷ I have no idea what roadhouse this refers to.

holding Ginger⁸ - and even if I say so myself, I think I was a cute little kid - at least I thought I was (laughs).



Fig. 3.1.2 Effie with her Father and Ginger

Life just went on from day to day. We were up on the hill, and the school was down little bit, not on the church grounds. There was a little slough, and there was bridge where we crossed, and the school was there. One time going to school I saw some rabbit tracks. I told Mr. Fullerton, "I want to catch a rabbit, would you get me a snare?"

"Nah!" He gave me some excuse or another, but I kept after him. I said, "I want to set a rabbit snare." Every day when I went to school, I'd see these rabbit tracks, and so I kept after him, until finally one day he made me a snare. You take #2 picture hanging wire, and you make it about two feet long. You make the end of it like a lasso. You put the end into the little loop part, and you could make a snare. The wire is so soft, you could shape it any

⁸ Ginger was Effie's own pup, the first dog that she ever owned.

way you want. So, he gave it to me and I said, "Oh, boy! I'm gonna go set a rabbit snare."

I started up this wood trail; everybody had a wood trail. They'd haul wood as soon as snow came. You'd hook up dogs to do things. I started up this trail, and I kept looking back to keep the house in sight. Pretty soon, I went back in the woods, and I couldn't see the house, so I was getting scared. I back-tracked and looked at the house and thought, "Oh, it's OK."

The first rabbit trail on the side of the road, I set my snare there. I took a willow, a willow that was strong enough that it won't break if a rabbit got caught. You're supposed to tie it on really good, so that when the rabbit is jumping against the wire, it won't come undone. So, I set the rabbit snare, and I went back home. Well, the next day I was a little braver, so I went back to visit to see my snare after school. I looked at it, and I said, "Gee, it was crooked." I just stuck it in the snow there without checking to see how good it was set. So I corrected it. By then I was not so scared to be alone out in the woods.

At least several days went by, and finally I caught a rabbit! There was rabbit in my snare. The rabbit was frozen solid. Until this day, I don't know if I really caught that rabbit, or Mr. Fullerton went back and planted a rabbit in my snare. I was so excited! I was so excited I caught a rabbit! I ran back to the house and I gave it to Mrs. Fullerton to clean. Of course, it was frozen. She had to wait. After she cleaned it, I kept begging her, "I want to cook that rabbit." I was anxious to eat the rabbit that I caught, and she kept putting it off. Finally, she

cooked it. She roasted it and simmered it with gravy. That's the first time I ever saw anybody use curry powder with rabbit. And, oh, it tasted so good! That was the best rabbit I ever tasted, because I caught it. I was putting meat on the table. I was being helpful and useful. I've never to this day had a rabbit that tasted so good. I was really used to getting animals to eat.

Later that spring, when I was seven years old, we were living on the Tanana River side three miles below Fish Creek.⁹ Fish Creek was a clear water stream that went miles and miles back into the swamps. There were a lot of lakes back there, and people used to go hunting and trapping, trapping muskrats and hunting ducks and stuff. In those days, you could take ducks in the spring-time, because there was no game law that said you can't. At that time, people didn't have freezers, so we had to eat off the country. I remember we went up the Fish Creek in spring-time, and my mother looked for a place to put up the tent. We had a four wall white tent with a ridge pole. For the floor, we put down spruce boughs. We would weave spruce boughs. On the Tanana River, the spruce is very thick. The boughs are very well grown, and we just weave them onto the floor so that it's flat, and even a baby can walk on it when it's put down properly. My grandmother and her husband had a tent right by us, between our tent and the lake, the part where my mother told us, "Don't go." We didn't go where we're not supposed to. That part belonged

⁹ There are many creeks called Fish Creek. I cannot see a creek by this name on the U.S.G.S. map of the area.

to my grandmother. We didn't have no business there. But on this side where our tent was, we could play all we want.

We had a regular grub box. When you have your grub box, it's like you have a picnic basket. We open the grub box, take out our dishes and have lunch. Our first lunch there, I was sitting close to the door, right by the grub box. While I was sitting there eating, we saw little mice. The mice were all over. The mice at those places were clean. They had a clean diet - all they do is eat berries and roots, and there was no garbage for them to eat to contaminate the meat. So I knew they were clean. So, when this mice kept coming, we just chased it away and kept eating, because that's nature. It was something that you just take.

So after we got through eating, I said, "Mom, I'm gonna make my own living." I saw how my father go out and he hunt ducks, he hunt muskrats, and he brings it home and we eat that. I said, "Mom, I'm gonna survive on my own." Because you see it every day, you think nothing of it. So I says, "OK I'm gonna kill that mice¹⁰." So after everybody got through eating, they all left the tent and I was alone in there. I tried to catch that mice. It was quiet in there - only me. So I hit at it, and it went away. It came back, and I hit at it. I don't know how long I sat there, but I finally hit it, and I got the mice. I wasn't scared to pick it up. I wasn't scared to touch it, 'cause we touched everything that my mother ever brings home. That's part of our Native education...preparing food and

¹⁰ Effie was talking about a single mouse, but called it a mice; I am not correcting the pluralization of mouse.

stuff. So I say, "Mom, I found a knife. I'm gonna skin this mice."

She said, "Go ahead." My mother let us go, as long as we don't hurt ourselves, because everything we do, we're learning - learning how to do things. We're learning how to handle a knife, we're learning how to go down to the beach without slipping in the river. There were gravel beaches, and there were cut banks in places.

So I got a knife, I don't know what kind. I skinned that mice and took the guts out. This took me a couple of hours, at least. Then I needed a bucket to cook in. Well, if I'm gonna survive on my own, I got to make my own bucket! I got a tin can, I open it with a can opener, like a G.I. can-opener, except it had a handle. I cut the lid off the milk can. We always had milk 'cause mother didn't have enough milk to feed the babies. By that time the stores had milk, and we could put our baby on milk. I took this milk can and I don't know what I put on for the handle, probably a small wire or something. I put the mice in there. I got water, I don't remember where I got water - probably from my mother's tent. I could just see this spot where I planned to build a fire. First, I pushed all the leaves apart and got twigs. But I didn't know the difference between dry twigs and not-dry twigs. My mother taught us how to strike a match, she taught us how to light matches without injuring ourself. So I lit the fire with a birch-bark. I was so anxious to finish my job, I kept smothering the fire out. Because every time the flames start getting big, I put the bucket right on there and killed the flames. I know I was doing wrong right then,

but I kept on. I was holding this bucket with my hand, so I know it wasn't that hot. When the water start to get warm, and the mice wasn't so red, I thought to myself, "Oh, I'm gonna eat it - it's done." I know it did not boil. I picked the pot off the fire and must have fished the mice out with a stick. I remember I took a bite out of it. It tasted flat. It tasted tough because it didn't cook, it just warmed up. Then I remember just walking away. I don't know what I done with the mice. I remember walking away, walking over to my mother's tent, and I was thinking, "Hmmm, my mother's cooking tasted better than that!" That's all I remember of that episode. But it was the beginning of me learning how to do things for myself...learning how to survive, learning how to make use of what we had. I think that's why my mother let me go, because it was a learning time, which we were willing to do, gladly.

By the time I was eleven years old, the winter I was eleven years old, my father died. He died of a accident, and from then my life changed.¹¹

After my father died, I don't know what happened to my sister next to me. I think she went to school down in Anvik, where they had a church school.¹² Isabel and Roy, I don't know what happen to them, but after my father died, seems like just my mother and me and the two little kids were alone.¹³ I was forever babysitting. I baby-sat while my mother would go out and work or cut wood or do what she

¹¹ This was the shooting death of Effie's father, which was determined by Fairbanks law to be a suicide.

¹² Irene (Lester) was the sister born after Effie, Isabel (Svoboda) was next, and Elsie would be too young.

¹³ In the 1930 Census, Isabel was 2 ½, John (Frank) was 2 months old.

had to do. I never complained, because that was my job, to help my mother. We were living in town, and I don't remember if I went to school or not.

We went to camp, and I used to have to baby-sit, wash dishes, and stuff like that while my mother cut fish. That summer, we stayed with Charlie Erhart. Charlie Erhart had a camp at Eightmile.¹⁴ Our camp was at Sixteen Mile Island, and so we move down to Eightmile, and we were staying there. Charlie's wife's name was Nettie, and they had a couple kids, and one of them was Elizabeth. Elizabeth and I grew up together. We grew up together, and we were buddies since we were little. We learned how to work. We learned how to try to wash clothes on a wash board. We were playing at growing up. I always noticed that Elizabeth seemed to work better than me - somehow I found her work a little neater than mine, a little better. When she washed clothes, she seemed to do a better job. She was supposed to be younger than me. Later on, we found out her mother made a mistake, and she was older than me. That's why I found her work a little more "finished" than mine was. We were with them when I turned twelve. At camp, we always kept old people with us. It was just a habit when my father was alive. He kept his mother. And when Old Moses¹⁵ was around, not in jail or something, he was there too. My father always supported them. When my father died, it was automatic, they came to stay with us. They

¹⁴ There is an island called Eightmile Island on the Tanana River, but no indication of a named island at sixteen mile on the current USGS map. Old camps are not generally identified.

¹⁵ Old Moses was married to Lucy after she was divorced from John Folger, Sr.

were staying with us, and my mother cooked, and they ate in our tent and everything.



Fig. 3.1.3 Lucy and Old Moses

We slept in a tent, and there were a lot of mosquitoes. We had no mosquito dope. We all had our own mosquito net. I had mine, but I shared with my brother or somebody. My mother had her own, what she kept over them with the babies. A mosquito net is made out of cheese cloth, and it's just like a big paper box, stretched over your bed.

One morning while my mother was cooking, I got up and went out the bathroom, and I felt sticky. I came back and I told my mother what happened. She says, "Oh, God, I wish your father was here." Well, she was thinking I was going to be deprived of something that people used to cherish. When the girl gets the first period, they put her separate

and give her new wash basin that she could use. She's supposed to learn how to sew. She's supposed to learn how to be a lady. Like my mother said, "It's time for me to grow up." I could even be a mother. The grown-up part didn't register, but being a mother, "Oh, golly!" I thought, "How wonderful it is."

I asked my mother afterwards, "Can I have a baby?" She said "NO!"

Well, she said I could be a mother. I guess that was her way of telling me my body had changed.

3.2 Effie Leaves Tanana for Eklutna

Anyway, about a month after that, we all went to town. When we go to town, we all go in one boat because we didn't have much gas and not many people had motor boats. My mother had my father's boat yet. That's before the store took it away for credit owed.

We went to town in the boat, and Elizabeth and her mother went with us. Nettie Erhart loved company. She loved to talk. Every chance she got she wanted to be with people. We went to town, and we stayed in their house. When we went to town we either stayed at their house or we stayed with Grandma. This time there was a lot of talk going around. The children would not listen. We didn't try to hear what our mothers were talking about. They were talking and talking, and they said, "You're gonna go to school." Well, I had been going to school.

They said, "You're gonna go away. You're gonna go away on the steamboat, and you're gonna go to a place

called Eklutna,¹⁶ and you're gonna stay there." Gee, that was strange to me. We had no clothes to wear. We didn't have no store bought clothes or anything, and I was scared.

Elizabeth spent the night with me, and we were talking. We must have been feeling sorry for ourselves. I guess she must have got jealous that I was doing something that she wasn't. During the night sometime we decided she was gonna go with me. She said, "I wanna go with you."

We talked about it some more. In the morning we got up and she told her mother, "I'm gonna go with Effie. I'm gonna go on a steamboat."

Well, that was a big thing, because we had seen steamboats going up and down the river all our life. To go on one was something exciting. When the steamboat came up, we were supposed to get on there with Mr. Miller. He was the one that was picking us up. He was the agent to the government school. He was taking kids from the river that can't afford to go to school on their own. So when Mom and them talked with Mr. Miller, he said "Yes."

This was all the preparation needed. Elizabeth went with me on the steamboat. We got on the steamboat, and we started off. We pulled away, and, of course, we cried. But there were all sorts of other children on the steamboat, like Bertha Pitka (Jimmie at the time) and her brother, Lawrence, and Reba and a few others. There were eight of us together. Of course, I was very excited about

¹⁶ Eklutna was a vocational school located approximately twenty miles north of Anchorage. Students from all over the state came to Eklutna. Those from areas like Nome or Kotzebue flew in large B-23s to Anchorage, then took the train north to Eklutna, which had a train depot and a large campus. The campus had large two-story girl's and boy's dorms and buildings that contained classrooms, training shops, animal

meeting new children, but I guess I was lonely for a while. I remember turning to these older children and crying; they cuddled me when I cried. I liked that, so I cried a little more.

We knew most of the Native people that worked on the steamboat, and we knew this one guy. He was the fireman on the steamboat.¹⁷ Us children would go down to the firehouse and watch him throw wood into the fire. We had known him for years. I was twelve years old, and he was probably about eight or ten years older than me. He asked me, "When you come back from Eklutna, would you marry me?"

I thought to myself, "Golly, that's too far away." I had never even thought of marriage. I didn't even know what kind of experience it was having a boyfriend or nothing. Being lonesome and away from home, I said "Ya", and then I forgot all about it. I told him I would marry him. To me, talking about marriage was like agreeing to a cup of tea or something.

Elizabeth and I went to Eklutna. We got on the train, and we stopped, probably half way there.¹⁸ We had to stop to stay overnight. We were going on a freight train. We stopped in a hotel there,¹⁹ and I wanted to go to the bathroom real bad. On the train, I could go bathroom, number two, and there was nothing there. But in the hotel room, it was so clean and you could see the evidence.

houses, and administration. The school operated from 1924 to 1945, when it closed. Poldine Carlo told me that when she was there, the students could hear the train whistle at night, and it was a sorrowful sound.

¹⁷ He is later identified as Ambrose (probably Kozevnikoff).

¹⁸ The steamboat would have stopped in Nenana, where the children that were going to Eklutna would have boarded a train headed south toward Anchorage.

I went to Elizabeth and I told her, "I got to go to bathroom." She said, "Well, use that." I didn't want to. In the morning it was getting so that I could not hold myself until we got on the train. So she said, "Just go in there and do something." I didn't know what to do. I didn't know the word "flush" or anything. I had never seen a modern toilet before. So I went, and oh, it felt so good. When I was getting up, I don't know what I did - I must have touched a lever or something. I didn't know what I was doing, and the water started gushing out of the toilet! I ran out of there. I ran back to my room! I told Elizabeth, "I flooded the toilet, and the water is running all over!" We went back to the bathroom. I opened up the door and I looked in. I didn't see no water on the floor. Then we went to the stall that I used, and we looked in the toilet, and the water was calm. I didn't know what I was doing, because I never see a flush toilet before. That was my introduction to a toilet, which is so simple. Everybody knows how to go to the bathroom in the house now, but I didn't know because all I ever used was an outhouse.

We went on to Eklutna, and there were so many children around. We went in the door and everybody was upstairs, all looking at us, and I wanted to cry again. Grace and Flora Nollner were there, and they took me under their wings right away, they hugged me and loved me. I needed that so bad. I don't know about Elizabeth, whether she was getting comfort or not, but I was "glorying" that someone was comforting me and took me under their wing.

¹⁹ The trip on the train from Nenana to Eklutna stopped at the Curry Hotel.

I was used to obeying. I didn't stick up for myself, so I was an easy target for some of the children because I couldn't talk good English. I guess I was talking funny to them, with a northern village accent. They were laughing at me, making fun of me, and stuff. I was small, and I just let them go.

One day this one girl (she was the same size as me, but she was sort of a bully) pushed me down the stairs. The matron came out of her office and wanted to know what was going on. I wouldn't say nothing. The other girl didn't say nothing. I got the blame for running up and down the stairs - and here I got shoved down, but I didn't fall. I grabbed the banister and hung on, and I climbed right back up. That girl let me take all the blame.

In those days, if you do anything wrong you got a mark against you, then your privileges was taken away for something that was pleasant, something good. So, I had a black mark on me. They were forever picking on me. But I let it go.

When the school was checking on us, to see what we could do - what grade we were in and everything - they found out that I could sew. My mother had an old treadle machine. I used to play around on that machine, and I could sew a straight seam. I couldn't sit down on the chair and sew. I had to stand up and put one foot on the treadle and stand on one foot to sew. They found out I knew how to sew, so they put me in a special class. I went to school only half a day.

At that time they were making new sheets. They took a whole double bed sheet and cut it in half and made it

shorter. They cut it down the side, and what they cut off the side, they added to the bottom for length, and made single bed sheets. That was all straight-stitching. That was my first chore there, to make sheets. I done that the whole fall - I don't know how long it took.

Every month we all had different chores. I always stayed in a special class. Then they put me on dining room duty. Later on, they put me in kitchen duty. I always kept falling back on either sewing or dining room duty.

I graduated to making nightshirts, and making petticoats. All the girls wore bloomers with elastic above the knee and elastic on the waist. We all wore bloomers, nightgowns, and petticoats that were all homemade.

They kept giving me the dining room, and after a while in the dining room I started serving on the staff table. I'd have to make sure the water glasses were full, and cups of coffee. I'd bring them their hot food and put it on the table. That seemed to be what they were putting me on more and more.

After a year or so I started working in the kitchen. I was small for my age, very small. I was a good worker, I guess, because they kept giving me the same things over and over. It wasn't a hard job. Some people had to work in the laundry, and some people were on bread duty. They had to bake bread. I thought to myself that being a waitress, working in the dining room, clearing off the tables and cleaning the floor and the tables afterwards was easy.

After a while there, I started working in the kitchen. We had a cook. She was from Scotland. Everybody used to laugh at her, and she wasn't very popular with the staff.

I don't know why. She was kind and good. A lot of kids didn't like her. She was a kitchen cook, and they didn't like taking orders from her.

The first time I went in the kitchen, we had to fill the flour bin, then we had the 50 pound cloth sacks that flour came in. We had to shake the flour out of those sacks good, unravel them and make dish towels out of them. After you opened them up, you had to wash them. You had to wash them hard so that all the writing on the flour sack came off. The first time I did that, I must have done a good job because my towels came out good and white. Then you put them on the stove to boil. I don't know who did that part, but I was scrubbing my towels.

I remember after that, I heard somebody say, "I can't get these sacks clean." The cook said, "I know you can, because Effie can do it." That's when I noticed that she was sort of favoring me, because she could use me as a example. I was sort of proud, but I didn't see why that girl couldn't scrub those towels good enough to get the writing off.

Anyway, I started being more and more helpful on the stove, even though I was small. I tried to stir the soup and the rolled oats. I cooked cereal in a pot, and I had a hard time trying to stir it. The cook had a stool made for me that I could put by the stove and stand on and stir those pots good. I became, officially, the cook's helper. She was very nice to me. When I worked in the kitchen she made me come home and have a snack at recess instead of playing with the kids. I'd come home, and she made me have a jam and butter sandwich.

When I went back to dining room duty, I lost that extra pound that I had gained that month. So, she told me, "You come back every recess." Every day during recess I'd go home. I was excused from the playground. I went home and had a slice of bread. She was trying to get me to put on some weight. Oh, I thought she was just great.

As time went on, she trusted me more and more. Pretty soon she said, "Could you open the kitchen for me tomorrow morning?" I said, "Yeah." She said, "Just come to my room, get the keys and open the pantry and get things ready for breakfast." I said "Sure," and so I got the keys several times. She would ask me every once in a while to open up. The last year there, I was doing it on a regular basis every day. Every day I would go up to her room and open the door, pick up the keys and go open the pantry, get hot water started or whatever we were doing. I'd get everybody started in the dining room and in the kitchen. They weren't supposed to show favoritism, so she wouldn't let me come to her room or anything like that. She showed me that she cared by being nice to me. My time was mostly in the kitchen and dining area.

One time I was sent to the laundry, but I guess they thought I was needed more where I was familiar with what I was doing.

More time went by, and I learned how to do as I was told. I learned how to go by time, to do everything according to time.²⁰ I learned how to be responsible for what I did.

The dorms were divided into three wings upstairs. Somehow or other, I was the one that the matron put in charge of the wings. I had to go up there and wake up the girls that were in charge of each room, then come back and wake up the girls in my wing. That was my job.

There was a girl in the little children's class that used to wet her bed every night. They couldn't figure out what to do to keep her from wetting her bed. They decided that one of the older girls should sleep there and get her up during the night.

When I was on duty, that girl never wet her bed, because every night I trained myself to wake up and take her to the bathroom. She never wet her bed, not once, while I was there. Then they changed, and somebody else took over that duty. She started wetting her bed again.

For some reason, the dean's wife didn't like me. She was the one in charge of 4-H and the sport activities, and she had it out for me. I guess I rubbed her the wrong way right from the start. I didn't care as long as the cook liked me. That meant a great deal to me - that somebody liked me.

I was the one who cleaned her husband's (the Dean) office once a week. And I was assigned to clean the principal's office. It was a building away from the dormitory, next to the hospital. I went there and cleaned the room. Somehow she just never liked me. Several things happened that she punished me for. I didn't like it, but I never said nothing.

²⁰ Before being at Eklutna, Effie did not use a clock or know how to tell time.

Then, somebody got in trouble, and she got expelled. She was fifteen years old, and I was fifteen years old. She wrote to her mother and she left. She left for home right away after school was out.

I thought, "Well I want to go home, too." I thought, "Goll, I can pull that trick, too." So, I wrote to my mother. I told her, "I want to go home. If you don't send for me, I'm gonna run away." I had no idea of running away! But I said that because I wanted to sound like those other girls (laughs). Then, sure enough, they told me, "Well, you're leaving - you're going back home." I was sort of excited.

I started to get ready. I made a dress, a red dress, and a sort of khaki dress. I freshened up my underclothes. I sneaked, and I made myself a pair of panties with no elastic above the knees. I hid them. I took them, and boy, my mother kept an eye on those panties after I got back to Tanana. I don't know why she didn't like me to wear those panties, but I liked to wear them.

3.3 Return To Tanana

Then I started my trip home. We got back to Nenana on the train, and from there we got on the steamboat. The first thing Ambrose said to me was, "Remember, you promised to marry me?"

I thought, "Oh, my God, what am I getting into?" I didn't know what to say. He pressured me all the way to Tanana. I don't know how many days it took, because we had to stop at every town to let off freight and stuff. It wasn't all traveling time. There was a lot of time tied up on the bank. We had to stop and pick up wood, because the

steamboat was burning wood. I spent some time in the furnace room with Ambrose, because I was lonesome and I wanted to be connected to somebody.

We got to Tanana sort of early in the morning. I woke up my grandmother. Then my mother and them came. While I was at Eklutna, she married Sam Joseph, and she had one or two kids with Sam Joseph.

I came home, and I had to be like the babysitter for these kids. I just took right over, like being a little mother.

I started doing all the cooking and cleaning and washing clothes and everything for the family. I just went right into being a woman. But I expected that, because that was the way they expected women to act, although my girlfriends didn't have that problem. My girlfriends were from a father that didn't have other kids. But my mother had all my brothers and sisters, so I didn't have the freedom that my friends had. I had a hard time adjusting to another man in the house - and the different style. And, it was back to my outhouse, of course.

Ambrose kept pressuring me to marry him. Goll, I was only fifteen. I told my mother, "Yeah, I'll marry him." I never connected marriage with love, I never connected it to nothing except doing what my mother wanted, because I told her about my proposal. She thought it was a good idea. He was a good man, hard working. We could profit if I marry him. That's all they were thinking of was their gain. They never thought of what I was going through.

Anyway, I'll just cut this short - I broke off the engagement. It was getting too complicated for me, because

I was not ready to get married. I was having a hard time taking care of my mother's children. Anyway, I broke off the engagement. There were a lot of bad feelings.

In the meantime, people were hearing about how I worked, what a good girl I was. Other people wanted to marry me. Even from Stevens Village word came down - people didn't write letters and they had no phones, so they sent a message down, asking if I could marry somebody up there.²¹ It was getting out of hand.

I didn't have a boyfriend. I had one friend, after I came back from Eklutna. His name was Carl Moses.²² He was a companion, someone for me to talk to. My mother never let me go out or visit with kids or go to other people's house. She just kept me working all the time.

We went to a couple of dances, and that's where I met my husband, Andrew. I knew he sort of liked me, but I wasn't allowed to talk to him. I could dance, but outside of the dance floor I couldn't talk to him.

But my girlfriend had told me, "That's my boyfriend." So, to me that meant "Hands off!"

Back when we were at the Mission, I had to go down a steep bank and carry up water in five gallon gasoline cans, and, by golly, that was hard!

I was coming up the bank with two buckets of water. My girlfriend and some other people were standing on the bank. One of the girls (not the girl that told me that

²¹ Stevens Village is approximately 140 miles upriver from Tanana.

²² Carol Gray is Carl Moses' daughter. After I got to know her she told me that Carl left Tanana at age 24 to go to Fort Yukon to spend time with his mother. He was raised by his grandmother in Tanana. He moved to Chalkyitsik and married Alice Henry. They had eight children. Carl died at age 62.

Andrew was her boyfriend) said, "You can have Andrew if you want him. I don't want him."

The night before that, there was a dance, and Andrew danced with me and talked to me. I never thought nothing of it. I didn't know that girl was also going with him, because I was ignorant about what was going on around me.²³

That fall some people from Rampart came. When Rampart boys came to Tanana, it was sort of exciting, because they were all young men. When they came down, it was a time for romance and everything. I was sort of excited about that.

My stepsisters, Pauline and Harriet, and these boys from Rampart were sitting around in the kitchen. I was just enjoying being part of the group. Then my mother called me from the front room and she said, "You come here and sit with me." She didn't want me to talk to boys. My life was just like I was in a vacuum. I couldn't do nothing. But I had to obey my mother, because if I didn't my stepfather used to get mean to her when he was drinking. So I always worked hard to keep peace.

In the meantime, I still had to do all the cooking, washing clothes and taking care of the kids. But I did it because somebody had to do it, and I was the only one available. My stepsisters and brothers didn't do too much to help me, although my stepsister was a little older than me. My stepbrothers were older than me.

²³ Andrew was a tall, good-looking man who apparently attracted female attention. Andrew was a skilled outdoorsman. Years earlier, at age 17 he was a long distance mail carrier by dog sled, between Tanana and Wiseman. In a short recording in the Oral History Department in the Rasmuson Library Andrew talked about the trail to Wiseman, calling it 'the roughest run in the country.' It was 500 miles, and sometimes he had to walk ahead with snowshoes, come back and lead the dogs, so he walked 30 miles to advance 10. He used 11-13 dogs, feeding them 1.5 salmon each and a chunk of tallow (fat). They were not fast, but steady, and could go night and day if they had to.

Every time my stepfather was drinking, he'd want to marry me off. He'd ask those boys, anybody that's drinking with him, "You want to marry her?" He was getting to be a nuisance.

The closer I was getting to sixteen, well, he really started to put the pressure on me to get married. I didn't want to get married - I had enough to do taking care of that one house.

That spring, he was drinking again. He was drinking with this old white man named Rod. When they were drinking, we didn't pay any attention to who he was associating with. Then one day he asked me, "You want to marry Rod?" I said, "No!"

They started drinking together every day, and he kept pressuring me to marry Rod. Then they got my Grandmother in there, and then she started in. She said, "You want to marry Rod?" She'd say what good man he would be, how he would protect me and take care of me and everything. I still said, "No!"

Then one time they doubled up on me. I just couldn't stand the pressure anymore, so I said "Yes." And my mother said, "You be nice, because if you don't..." My stepfather was very mean to her. I just didn't know what to do, so I said "Yeah."

I went in the bedroom, and I shut the door, and I just cried and cried. Everybody was happy and everything, all except me.

My stepfather never let me have privileges of any kind. I never went to town. We stayed in the village part, which is three miles above town.²⁴



Fig. 3.3.1 Front Street Tanana Summer 1918, Frederick B. Drane Collection, UAF-1991-46-511, Archives, Alaska and Polar Regions Collection, University of Alaska Fairbanks

One day he going to go to town in the evening, and he told me to go with him. I said, "OK." He told his daughter to ride along with us. He told me to go back and

²⁴ The Native village was close to the Mission, and town was where Fort Gibbon had been built up. At one time it was a fairly large town, and was an important hub in Interior Alaska.



**Fig 3.3.2 Front Street, Rivenburg, Lawyer and Cora Photograph Album
UAF-1994-70-405, Archives, Alaska and Polar Regions Collection,
University of Alaska Fairbanks**



**Fig. 3.3.3 Front Street, Rivenburg, Lawyer and Cora Photograph Album
UAF-1994-70-403, Archives, Alaska and Polar Regions Collection,
University of Alaska Fairbanks**



**Fig. 3.3.4 Mission and Native Village, Walter and Lillian Phillips Photograph Collection, UAF-1985-72-49, Archives, Alaska and Polar Regions Collection
University of Alaska Fairbanks**

hook up the dogs. So I hooked up seven dogs, and we went to town.²⁵ We stopped in this white man's back yard.

Whenever we went someplace, we just tied the dogs in the back, at the foot of the cache. We'd just tie the leader and the sled, and the dogs would stay right there until we were ready to go again.

So we went in, and they were talking. Rod came over to us, and he told us to have a glass of wine. I didn't drink, and I didn't want to drink wine, but he said, "Sure, just take a little."

He poured a little in a cup for us, and my stepfather said, "Go ahead, drink it." I remember only taking a sip or two. I don't remember even finishing that cup. That's all I remember, sitting at the table.

It was a one-room house, where the table was right by the bed, and the bed was right there. The windows and stuff were on the other side. When I could think straighter and knew what I was doing, I was sitting on the bed and I told Rod I will not marry him.

My stepfather said "Let's go," so we left his house. When we got home, I tied and fed the dogs, then went in.

My mother said, "What's the matter?" I said, "Nothing." I just went in and laid down.

The next day, my stepfather told me "You're not welcome in this house anymore. You get out! We're going back up to camp, and we're leaving you here."

I went ahead and fed the kids, and I got everybody ready to move. I hooked up the dogs and brought the dog team in front of the house and loaded up the kids.

Someone came out and said they wanted to talk to my stepfather next door. So he went over there. I didn't know what was going on. Somebody told me, "They're having a meeting over there." He came back, and he never said a word.

I got the kids, and put everybody in the sled. When they started to leave, I just jumped on the sled and went with them. I didn't know that at that meeting they bawled him out for trying to force me to marry somebody. They must have made him feel ashamed; he never said a word to me.

We went back up to camp, and he never said a word to me. I just continued with everything that I was doing.

²⁵ Dog teams were still the main mode of transportation in the winter, using overland trails and the river after it was frozen.

I thought to myself, "Well, Andrew is the only one that I would care to be with." The only person I liked was Andrew. Anyway, I made up my mind. During that spring sometime, I wrote a letter to Andrew. I said, "Andrew, if you really like me, and want to do something about it, you better do it now, because things are getting sort of difficult at home." I never thought nothing of it.

Up in camp it was the same thing - just work, work. My stepfather had a moose-skin. When he killed a moose awhile back, he just froze it. It was a nice, not-too-large skin. He brought it back, and it was at the camp. That spring I told my mother, "I want to clean that skin. How do you clean a moose-skin?"

She told me that there was a flesher hanging up in the smokehouse, in the cache, to take that flesher and what to do. I started cleaning the moose-skin outdoors against the house when it was getting nice and warm. First, I had to cut all the hair off. I learned to cut the hair off without cutting the skin, how every stroke of the knife while cutting the hair off is a different experience. I did cut a hole, so I had to slow down. I was very gentle. I cut all the hair off, and then I grained the skin.²⁶ She told me how to flesh it. I was fleshing it, and my flesher slipped, and I cut my hand real bad right between my pointing finger and my thumb. So, I must have let it go for awhile, then I finished it.

My mother couldn't show me, because she was bedridden by that time. Somebody came to our camp from the next camp, and she told him to go out and get me a stick that I

could grain that moose-skin with. So he went out and got a spruce tree. He cut the length that I needed, and then he peeled it. That left a smooth surface. I grained it on that.

My stepfather and I made rawmane.²⁷ From his frozen moose-skin, I labored, took care of it...and we made rawmane. Rawmane was very useful for people in those days. To build a sled you had to use rawmane to tie all the joints. And then you use it for snowshoes. It was a good thing to have. So I was very proud of that. I was learning to do things.

I was lonesome, very lonesome as a teen-ager. The only real pleasure I had, where I could just be alone, was when I used to cook the dog-feed. You cook your dog-feed every day to make it last longer. I used to go down to where the dogs were tied, and I'd build a fire and cook a meal for them every day. Standing by that camp-fire and watching the dog-pot boil and stuff was the only recreation I had that I enjoyed. That was just the way my life was going.

I never talked back to my mother or stuck up for myself. I just let them boss me around.

That fall we were in camp. We had stayed at camp all summer, and we had a hard time. It was during the Depression, and we didn't have much food. Whenever we really needed something, my stepfather used to cut wood for the steamboat and sell enough wood to buy a little food.

²⁶ Graining is the processes of removing any remaining particles of flesh, fat and sinew.

²⁷ Rawmane is the binding that is made out of moose-skin, generally thicker and stronger than the babiche made out of caribou hide.

You didn't do things with cash. We just had wood, the steamboat took it, and we got credit at the store. We were really having a hard time.

My stepfather said, "Well, I think we're gonna go down and spend fall in the village." So we started down. Oh! How I wanted to hurry up and go over to the village. We were coming down in a poling boat. We untied all the dogs and they walked on the bank, while we went down in the boat. In those days, the dogs used to understand what people were doing, when we were moving and stuff. They were pretty well trained to do what they were supposed to do.

We stopped on the island right across from the village. The dogs swam to the island, and we tied them all up. We spent the night there. We just put up a tent, a lean-to, built a camp-fire, cooked and went to bed. I could hear music in the dance hall in my imagination, just thinking of all the excitement that's going on.

The next morning, we left the dogs all tied on the island and we paddled across.²⁸ Of course, I was rowing, and my stepfather was steering the boat, and we went over and landed. Then we had to go back over and get the dogs and bring them back over in the boat. We just put all the dogs in the boat, like you would a truck right now. The dogs understood the things we were doing.

Then somebody said, "Andrew is asking about you - he wants you to go with him."

²⁸ Camp was on the Tanana River, on the south side of the Yukon. They would have paddled across the Yukon River to the village.

Chapter 4 Marriage, the Early Years

3.2 Effie and Andrew Married October 9, 1935

Andrew had a boat, and he had to take some people up the Tanana River.²⁹ People used to buy gas, and whoever had a boat would take them wherever they wanted to go.

I was sort of excited. This one girl had said that Andrew wanted to marry me. I had a couple of nights to think about it.

Then one day my mother said, "We're going to go to town." It was October by then. I was home alone with the kids, and my stepsister³⁰ and them were there. Andrew came, coming back down the river. He stopped, and he said, "You wanna go with me?" I thought to myself, "Why not?"

I said, "Yes." He said, "OK, get ready." So, I got ready and got in the boat with him and went to Tanana.

As soon as people saw me in the boat with him everybody was "rarararar", you know how gossip goes, and word went through town that I was going to marry Andrew. My mother and father heard about it. It was almost 6:00, and we went down to the Commissioner's office. The Commissioner said, "Well, I'm eating supper now, come back in half an hour." I didn't know what to do. I was sort of scared.

In the meantime, my mother and stepfather came down there. My stepfather says, "You know what you're doing?" I said, "Yeah."

My stepfather said, "If you do this, don't you ever come back if things don't go right. You're out of our

²⁹ He would take trips to Cos Jacket or other stops along the Tanana River, or Yukon River.

³⁰ Effie's stepsisters were around the same age, so they could watch younger children as well.

lives completely, and you're on your own." He says, "Don't you come back for anything." That was his wedding gift to me, I guess, like he was releasing me.

The Commissioner³¹ came back to where we were and said, "Yeah, come on, let's get started." Andrew had a ring already, so we got married. For the price of ten dollars, we could get married right now, so in half an hour, I was married.



Fig. 4. 1.1 Marriage Certificate

We went back to the house. We were gonna have a dance that night, and we were getting ready. We went up to Mission and had a dance, and we danced. It was all strange to me. In those days people were really poor - they didn't have nothing! So, for my wedding cake, Bergman Kokrine (at that time he became my brother-in-law) bought cookies. Andrew had stayed in fish camp all summer, so he brought some eating fish. So we had cookies and dry fish and

coffee at the wedding reception. By 5:30 a.m., we were all through dancing, and we went back to town. You know, we used to dance all night.

Then Andrew (I don't know what he was doing) said, "Take Henry up to the house." Henry Kokrine³² was five years old. He was asleep, and I had to pack him all the way up to the house. I thought, "Gee, what a way to start married life." You know, I just get out of one household and step into taking care of a kid.

I went up and by 6:30 - well, that was our wedding night. We had to get up right away and get ready to go back up the river, because it was October. It was fall-time, so we had to hurry up and do things, so we got ready.³³

We went up the Mission, to pick up my clothes. I told my mother that I got my period...and I thought she wouldn't know. She said, "How could you? You just had it a week ago." I didn't say nothing.

My mother said, "Take your five-year-old sister with you." She said, "You take her with you, you have nothing to do anyway. You might as well take one of these kids to take care of." Elsie turned five that day, so I had a five-year-old sister to take care of. She was whiney, and she clung to me all the time. Every move I made, she was clinging to me.

³¹ The Commissioner was Warren W. Thompson, father to Morris Thompson.

³² Henry was the son of Bergman Kokrine but was raised by Mary (Kokrine) and Phillip Kennedy. Bergman was married twice, but I don't think he was married at this time.

We left in the evening and went about six miles up the Yukon River.³⁴ Bergman and Arthur Antoski³⁵ were with us. They said, "We'll camp here." There was a relief cabin there, and so we decided to camp there and get a early start in the morning, that way we were at least out of town. (Remember, it's October 10 by then. On the Yukon River you don't know what the river would be like. Of course, I didn't know either).

So we tied up the dogs on the beach. Bergman and Arthur slept in the cabin, and we slept in the boat. We had just a tarp over the boat, and we slept in there. In the morning, we got up and Andrew says, "Go up and cook breakfast."

Gee, I didn't think as soon as I got married he would be telling me what to do. I remember frying bacon. Bergman had worked in a mining camp at Rampart, so they had a little money to get started in the fall-time. Andrew had to fish for the dogs, 'cause that was very important that they had enough dry fish for the dogs for the winter. Bergman had the money, so they helped each other.

I cooked breakfast, and there was no light in the cabin. Where the stove was, it was dark. I guess I must have of burnt the bacon. Bergman, my brother-in-law, said, "You're just like a regular bride. You cook and you burnt the bacon." I said, "Well, I can't see good on the stove." It sort of hurt my feelings.

³³ Ice starts building up on the banks of the river in October, and ice chunks can start floating.

³⁴ The Yukon River flows from Canada to the Bering Sea, so toward Canada is up-river.

³⁵ Arthur Antoski was Andrew and Bergman's cousin.

We started up the river. I don't know how far along we were, because I was not familiar with the Yukon River - it was all new country to me.

We saw some caribou, so we stopped and got a couple.³⁶ We clean them and put them in the boat. We had our dogs with us. I don't remember if we had two boats, one for the dogs, or not. But we put the meat in the boat, and we kept a'going. We went up to where we were gonna camp, at Fish Creek,³⁷ fifty miles above Tanana. We stopped there and stayed overnight. The next morning Andrew says, "Get up and cook breakfast." I felt like a slave even then - strange people, strange house, a bachelor's house.

I said, "What will I cook?" You know, we never had pancake mix or nothing. We had to start sourdough.³⁸ There was an old sourdough pot there, so the night before I started the sourdough. Sourdough was very important because we had no other breakfast food. Every morning, we used to make sourdough hotcakes.

Andrew said, "Go down to the boat and bring up a caribou ham and fry up some meat." I thought to myself, "Golly, can somebody cook for me once in my life?"

I went down to the bank. The dogs were there, and they were sort of glad to see me. I carried the meat up the bank, and I cooked breakfast. Then we went up to Twelvemile. Twelvemile is twelve miles below Rampart.

³⁶ The men were experienced hunters who shot game with a minimum number of bullets to conserve what they had.

³⁷ Fish Creek is where Andrew was raised.

³⁸ Sourdough can stay active for a long time, but ideally water and flour should be added at least weekly to keep the cultures in the dough active.

That's where we were gonna spend our winter. We got in the boat again and went up there. It was getting very cold by then.

We took our dogs, our meat and whatever we had, and we went up on the bank and put up a tent. When we were putting up the tent, my husband says, "Get some spruce boughs to put on the bottom."

I looked around on the bank, and there were just shrubby trees. I said, "Where will I get the spruce boughs?" On the Tanana River, where I was raised, the spruce boughs were nice and healthy - big boughs. Here, on the Yukon River, they were scrawny. I looked around and there was nothing!

He said, "You just get the spruce boughs." So I chopped down a tree and got some spruce boughs, and you couldn't even weave it into the floor like I was used to. I was used to laying down floor right. He just cut them up and laid them all over the floor.

Arthur Antoski took the boat and went back to Tanana so he could get it out of the river before it froze. There was ice forming on the beach. We were left alone.

The dogs were tied along the bank. There was one red dog there that you had to pass to go down the bank. So I started petting it and talking to it. Andrew saw me talking to this dog, and he said, "Don't talk to the dogs, don't spoil them." So I tried not to show affection to the dogs.

I was lonesome, thinking, "What am I getting into?" Andrew and Bergman talked all the time, and I had nothing to say.

Andrew and Bergman went back into the woods. There was a lake back there - I don't know how far back it was. On this side of the lake there was this old cabin that they used to use for trapping. They were putting a new roof on it, so Andrew and Bergman were gone most of the day. They just come back to eat.

One day, after it snowed a little bit on the ground, Andrew told me, "Go back to the lake and cut grass for the dogs."³⁹ In the old settlement on the Tanana River, the grass was nice and healthy and real thick, you could cut grass for the dogs real easy.

I took a knife and I started back, and my five-year-old sister started to walk with me. She said "I'm tired, I can't walk." I know a five-year-old could walk, but she didn't want to. So I had to carry her on my back and take her back to the lake. I didn't know where I was going, but I followed the trail. I looked around for grass, and there was no grass, just that funny, coarse-looking grass that grows on the side of the lake. That's the only grass I could find. So, I cut a little bit, what little I could find, and I started back to the tent. Elsie said, "I'm tired, I can't walk." So I had to carry her back again.

I was not satisfied with my life. It was something strange, and I was baby-sitting every day. I couldn't even walk on the beach, couldn't do nothing for me.

After a week they finished that cabin, and we moved back there. By that time there was snow on the ground. We had our sled, dogs and harnesses, so we moved back there.

There was no water. We had to melt snow every day to try to get enough water for the house. When you get snow, you have to go away from the house, and get the clean snow, so it's not dirty with the stuff from the trees and such.

We still had the caribou meat, and Andrew and Bergman whipsawed⁴⁰ boards and made a roof structure. They whipsawed logs and cut enough boards to put a little floor between the bed and the stove. By the doorway there was no floor, so they whipsawed enough boards to do that. Our bed was made out of small little trees. You just put the little trees on the bottom, put a lot of spruce boughs on there and a little grass or something. I remember I put grass on there. You put the bedding on there, and that was our bed. We were there for a while.

One morning while I was cooking breakfast, we heard a rumble. It was just like the earth started shaking. Andrew jumped up and grabbed the gun and ran out the door. He ran behind the house where the noise was coming from. He got up on this ridge right behind the house. I stood at the door. Elsie was clinging to me, crying!

Pretty soon, I heard this shot! I saw caribou come running past the house. There was a great big herd of caribou. They came right by the house - right past the dogs! A couple of them went on the left side of the cabin, but most of them were on the right side of the cabin. I was amazed! I was just - you know - I never saw so many caribou! I had never seen caribou before, until then,

³⁹ Tall grass was always cut in the fall when it is dry and yellow, used as bedding for the dogs.

⁴⁰ A whipsaw is a saw with handles on each end, intended for use by two people, to cut trees and lumber, widely used by people in rural Alaska before chain-saws.

besides the ones that we killed on the river. He shot a caribou. He was surrounded by caribou - he just stood against a tree, and the caribou went all around him. He got one, maybe two, I don't remember. Then, it was a while before it all quieted down. So we had enough meat, we had enough caribou to eat for that fall. We stayed there through fall-time.

I had a little moose-skin, and I tried to sew and stuff like that, because we all had to have outdoor moccasins for boots. We had to be prepared, you know, dress according to the weather in the winter-time. I was doing my best to sew for these two men. I tried to make Elsie sleep away from me, but she just had to sleep right with me. She clung to me 24-hours-a-day. That wasn't the kind of life I was imagining when I got married. I thought I'd be freer to do what I wanted.

Anyway, we were there one week, and I got my period again, and, oh, what a hard time! By Christmas, we were gonna go to Tanana, because we had to get supplies, and sell what little fur we had, and get some more food. By that time, I missed my period. I told Andrew, "I think I'm pregnant or something." I thought, I can't tell nobody...I don't want nobody to know I'm pregnant. I don't want anybody to know that I slept with a man! Anyway, it was sort of strange, going back to Tanana.

By that time the river was frozen. We went on the river. Where we had come up on the boat, we were going down on the dogsled - and it was all strange to me, and different. I had a lot to learn about a different type of life

4.2 Dog Races Start in the Spring

Andrew and Bergman had been talking. They said that Bergman was going to Fairbanks to get in the dog race. He was gonna take our dogs. Well, we were living out of town, and Bergman left with our dogs. We had one old dog and three young pups, that's all we had, and he left us there.

In March, Andrew and I decided to go back to Tanana. We had our sled loaded up, with everything in there, Andrew, me and Elsie and all the stuff we had to take. This one old dog and those pups were having a hard time, because they had a big load. This dog was working real hard. One time he turned back and rarararar,⁴¹ just growled and snapped at those pups. I guess he was telling them to work or to pull. It was just a strange life. Anyway, that's the way I started my married life.

That's the time when Bergman came to Fairbanks, and he got in the Livengood race. He got in the Livengood race, and he won that race.⁴²

⁴¹ Effie making noise like a dog growling.

⁴² *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, March 9, 1972 article: "In 1939, Bergman Kokrine emerged as a winner. He was the beginning of a long line of Kokrines that proved themselves great racers in Alaskan history. Berman was the 1940 winner of the Livengood Sweepstakes, one of the longest races ever run. The marathon was 165 miles in length and ran from Fairbanks to Livengood. After a 10-hour lay-over at Livengood, the mushers were pumping their way back home."



Fig. 4.2.1 Bergman, his wife Ruth, Effie and Andrew in Early Years

4.4 The Family Starts to Grow

The family moved back and forth between Tanana and the fish camp. They struggled to survive, having little opportunity to earn money. From these tapes, it would appear that money was earned by selling furs that were trapped in the winter and by selling fish. While there was a reference to Bergman working in a mine, there was no mention of Andrew working there. Effie's mother still depended upon her to help the family, and this next section indicates the sadness and hopelessness that Effie felt at that time, living back on the river in camp.

Ten months after we got married, I had my first baby.⁴³ Boy, I started losing weight! Everything I ate went to my breasts. I had so much milk, and my body was just getting skinnier and skinnier. I was so skinny my hip bones were just sticking out. I don't know, by that time we were in town.

My mother and them⁴⁴ had moved up to camp, and I had to start doing her work, too, and doing my work. I had a

⁴³ Effie's first baby was a girl named Shirley May, born in August, 1936.

⁴⁴ Effie's mother, Jessie, her step-father Sam Joseph and their children from the two blended families.

little more to keep me busy. I just wasn't satisfied with my life. And I was still confined to the house. One day I felt so lonesome and desperate. I told my husband, "I wanna take a walk - I wanna look for berries." My baby was almost a year old. I don't think she could walk yet. I thought, "Well, I'll go for a walk. I want to look for berries." There were no berries then. But anyplace you looked, up on the bank, there were berry vines.

I asked my mother if I could leave my baby with her. I still had Elsie, of course. We took a walk, and it was really good to get away from the house for a while. When we came back, I didn't have many berries, but I felt better. As soon as I walked into my mother's tent, she said, "Don't you ever leave your baby with me again."

Golly, I thought to myself, I took care of kids all my life, and I still don't have a babysitter when I want one. But my mother always told me, no matter what you get into - you made your bed, you have to stick to it. And she told me when you have kids, that's your responsibility. Don't get no one else to take care of your kids. All this stuff that I heard...I was trying to live by the rules, but it was very hard.

We had to use a sled for everything, and men had to have snowshoes for trapping and all that - even going out in the woods and cutting wood, you had to have snowshoes. About the second year of my marriage Andrew said, "I need new snowshoes." We started talking, and he said that he

could make the snowshoe frame, but he had no babiche,⁴⁵ no filling for the snowshoes. We had a caribou skin. I said I could clean the caribou skin, because I had cleaned a moose skin when I was single. I said I could clean the caribou skin, and we could make the snowshoe filling out of that.

When you make a snowshoe filling you have to use caribou skin because it's very thin. Now a moose skin, when you make babiche out of it, the moose hide is thick and it makes a stronger babiche (what you use to tie your sled, and make the sled - and snowshoes, you use snowshoe filling). He said, "OK, well, I'll make the snowshoe if you'll make the snowshoe filling. But he say, "Well, how are we gonna fill it?" I said, "We'll come to that when we get to it."

I got the caribou skin, and I cleaned it, and I told Andrew how to make rawmane,⁴⁶ because he'd never done it before. Here he is, eight years older than me, and I'm telling him how to do things, and I'm just a young girl myself. Anyway, we made babiche, and we dried it, and he made a frame.

We had a one-room cabin, so everything we did involved each other. So when it was time to put the snowshoe filling in the snowshoes, Andrew said he didn't know what he was doing. I asked him if he could make me a needle to weave the snowshoe filling in with. I told him how to make a needle. He reused a big nail, about three inches long,

⁴⁵ Babiche is made from caribou skin that is stretched over a frame, then cut in thin, continuous strips while it is wet. The skin is cleaned of fat, tissue and hair, and cut in a narrow strip to make a strong string, requiring a steady hand and a sharp knife. It is pliable when wet and hard when dried.

⁴⁶ Both rawmane and babiche are made by the same process, one is thicker than the other. They are like rawhide. Effie used these terms interchangeably in this dialog.

and flattened the nail out real good. He tapped it very lightly with a hammer until it was flattened. Somehow, he drilled a hole in the middle - I don't remember how he made the hole in the middle to make the snowshoe needle. I said, "Is there an old pair of snowshoes around that I can use for a pattern?" So he went out and he found an old snowshoe that was broken, and he brought it in. I looked at how it was woven, to see where the babiche stopped. I unraveled it, and put it back together. The next time I unraveled it, I went a little further, and put it back together. I did that several times until I got the idea of how to fill the snowshoes and make little diamonds all over. Once I got the idea, it was easy to follow the pattern. I followed the string, where it started and how it went, and I filled that snowshoe, and I did a very good job. When I got through, it had a bunch of little diamond like shapes, and it was done just perfect. That's the way we learned how to work. That's the way everybody learned how to work, by doing things. First they watch somebody, and then they do it.

Don't say, "I can't do it." Because, there's no such a word as can't, so you do the best you can, and if you make a mistake, fine - you learn by your mistakes.⁴⁷ You see what you done wrong and try to do it again. So, here I was, not even twenty years old yet, and I can make snowshoes, and clean my moose and caribou skins, and make my own babiche. I was very determined, I never let nothing stop me in working. I was very proud of my achievement.

⁴⁷ This is a lesson that Effie regularly tried to teach the children that she worked with. She really got irritated with people who would quit doing something difficult, stating "I can't do it."

That was one way to find satisfaction with myself, because I didn't have nothing really exciting in my life. Working was the only satisfaction I was getting. I wanted to prove to myself what I could do.

I got married in 1935, I had my first baby in 1936, I had my second baby in the fall of '37, and then I was pregnant with my third child. We went to Tanana⁴⁸ for April races.⁴⁹ That's when everybody gets together and shops for the spring-time. Like an R & R⁵⁰ - everybody goes to Tanana and everything. All the men used to get together and drink. I never drank. I just stayed home all the time. I wasn't included in all the fun that was going on.



Fig. 4.3.1 Effie and Andrew with Baby

⁴⁸ They had been staying in Larson's Camp, which used to be Hanson's Camp, where Andrew stayed and worked when he was a boy. The camp is now occupied by Chuck Hugny and Carrie Farr (Hugny).

⁴⁹ Tanana still has their Spring Carnival in April, highlighted by dog races.

⁵⁰ R & R is a military term, an acronym for rest and recuperation, a break in duty.

During the night somebody came to the door, and they said that they think Andrew broke his leg. I said, "Oh my God!" They brought him in and laid him down, and he said, "Go get the doctor. Go down to the hospital and tell them that I'm in pain, that we think I broke my leg." So I got dressed up, and I went down to the hospital.

The doctor just said, "Come back in the morning." So I went home and I told him, "They can't do nothing." He was in misery, and all the good time he had the night before sort of faded, and all the people he was with were not there, so I had to take care of him. He was just moaning and groaning, and that was the end of my sleep.

After a while he told me "Go back down to the hospital and tell them I gotta have something so the pain would go away." So I went back down the hospital again, and the doctor gave me something, maybe a sleeping pill, or aspirin. The next day we took him down to the clinic. I don't know how we got there because we didn't have cars. Oh yeah, in the sled. We put him in the sled and took him down to the hospital. They set his leg, and he was in the hospital. I was home with the kids.

The next morning I heard that Andrew and Bergman got in a fight, and that's how he broke his leg. I don't know...he must have knocked it against a doorframe or something. Anyway, early in the morning Bergman took off with the few dogs he had, and he went back up the River.

We had to make another trip up to camp. At that time we were staying at what they called John Larson's Camp. We stayed in there because Andrew stayed with Hans since he was fourteen-years-old. At that time it was Hanson's

cabin. Our food and stuff was up there. After he got situated good, Andrew told me, "You have to go up to the camp and collect our stuff." We had to pick up what little food we had and bring everything down to Tanana.

I said, "Well golly, I never traveled on the Yukon River alone before." He told me, "Take Harper along and go up and move camp." Harper Antoski was a young man, and he was Andrew's cousin. We went up there. We hooked up nine dogs and went up the Yukon River. In the spring-time you can travel good, where in the winter-time it takes two days. In the spring-time, when there's a little crust on the snow, you could go faster.

We went up there, and the next day I gathered most of the stuff, closed camp, and took it across the river to our main fish camp (Fish Creek). Bergman was there at the cabin, and I said something to him. He said "Just don't talk about it." So I just didn't say anything. I guess he was feeling guilty about what happened.

We took the stuff and went to Tanana. We had a little money from the trapping Andrew had done before April. He was in the hospital, and I thought, "What am I gonna do?" I was pregnant with my third child, and I didn't know how I was gonna eat.

There was a hospital in Tanana where people worked, but there were few jobs available to the girls, and they were all taken. Then toward spring, the nurses asked me, "Do you wanna work?" I said, "Sure!" They knew what a hard time I was having. Well, they said, "You can come in as a cook's helper." So I became a cook's helper.

Robert Sunnyboy⁵¹ was the cook, and I was his helper. I had to be there early in the morning, get things ready for breakfast and work through lunch break, then come back in the afternoon. I used to have a couple of hours to myself, until 4:30, then I helped with supper. Then after supper I'd have time to myself again.

We were having a really hard time getting enough to eat. What little meat we had, we had used up. Come spring-time, we didn't have much to eat. In the store, there was no food there to buy, but they had bacon. The bacon used to get moldy, but they hung it up high in the warehouse. Gregory,⁵² Andrew's uncle, was working in the store. He would take the vinegar and wipe down the bacon (while it was still in the store) to keep the mold off of it. One slab of bacon - that was all I was able to buy. So at least for one month we had bacon. We fried potatoes with bacon and just used bacon as our main food.

By that time my sister, Irene, was staying with us. Her daughter was born, and her husband died.⁵³ She was staying with us, so I had my sister, and Andrew's brother, Tony (his wife had left him). I was taking care of one extra kid, and I had two of mine, and I had to feed them all on forty dollars a month. I was making forty dollars a month. I could get credit in the store, but I had to be very careful what kind of credit I used. We were making ends meet because I was working hard.

⁵¹ Robert Sunnyboy was later married to Elizabeth Erhart. Her first husband was Ambrose Kozevnikoff.

⁵² Gregory Kokrine was Andrew, Sr.'s, brother.

⁵³ Irene was the sister who was younger than Effie, next in birth order. She had been staying with Effie with her young daughter. Irene was married to Charlie Kennedy and had a daughter named Susan (Susie), who was always close to our family because she stayed with our family a lot while growing up.

As soon as the river opened up, an old man named Otto,⁵⁴ that lived above town, put in a fish wheel. He let me get whitefish from there, so at least my kids had whitefish to eat every day.

Later on, in the summer when the salmon started running, I could get salmon and feed my kids.

In the meantime, there was another old white man that lived up the Mission Road, the road between town and mission, and he had a big garden. He was an old man, and he didn't need a big garden anymore. He told the people, "Anybody who wants to can use my garden."

He had potato seeds that we could use. I was very pregnant, by that time. I went up and worked up the ground, and I planted some potatoes. I was going up there almost every day to work. I kept my potatoes hoed and everything.

In the meantime, Otto's garden started to grow, so he gave me what little vegetables he could afford. Dear Otto, he was such a sweetheart! He was the one that really helped me. Another one that really helped me was young John Swenson, but I'm getting ahead of myself. In the fall when he got moose he gave me a moose hind-quarter, and that really helped me. Later on I was able to pay him back with a favor.

Anyway, we got rid of most of our dogs because we couldn't keep that many dogs in town without food, so we just kept about four dogs and got rid of the rest.

⁵⁴ 1910 Census records showed an Otto Gommery from Nebraska that was 32 years old, not sure if that would be the same person. He would have been approximately 60 at this time in the story.

So, I was feeding the dogs and my kids. For wood, I'd go up the beach and pick up driftwood and haul it back to the house. My father-in-law had a wheelbarrow that he used to haul wood with. So I'd put all my wood on the wheelbarrow, and I'd wheel it back to the house. I was getting wood for my use, so I was doing fine. Then Irene moved out from me, so I had to get up at four in the morning. Of course, we had our good old sourdough. I'd feed the kids hotcakes and stuff, then put them back to bed and go to the hospital to work. I worked through lunch, then come home and cook lunch for my kids, and then go back to the hospital and cook supper, come home and cook supper and put the kids to bed. I was just busy, but at least my kids were eating.

Then one day I carried a case of milk up the stairs from the basement and I started to spot, so the doctor said, "I think you'd better quit working." Oh, how was I gonna feed the kids? What am I gonna do when I can't feed the kids? The school teacher said, "Well, ask for welfare, ask for help. At least, they'll give you some food." There was some emergency powdered milk and stuff in the store, so they gave me some.

That fall, somebody must have wrote a letter to somebody in Fairbanks, and they said a welfare guy was gonna come down and interview me and check me out, to see if I really needed help. I was there at home waiting when he finally came. He came in the house and he looked around.

In the meantime, I had harvested my potatoes with the wheelbarrow. I dug up my potatoes, and I wheel-barrowed them all the way down to Tanana. It's half-way up Mission

Road,⁵⁵ and I was pregnant, a big fat stomach with a wheelbarrow full of potatoes. I got all my potatoes down there.

When you first dig up your potatoes you need to let them dry out, so I had them in the house in paper boxes. This man looked around, and said, "Whose potatoes are those?" I said, "Mine." He said, "Well, you've got potatoes, you don't need nothing else." So he told me, "Well, we're gonna give you eighteen dollars a month." Eighteen dollars to feed my sister, my niece, my children and Andrew!

Andrew was out of the hospital by then, and he was home. He didn't do much watching the kids, but my children were taught very early to take care of each other, to listen and do what I told them and be responsible for their actions. So I could leave them alone when I was working. When I went out to do things, I knew they were safe, because they didn't touch the fire...they didn't do nothing.

So he gave me eighteen dollars a month. What could you buy with eighteen dollars? So I made up my mind right then. I said I will never again ask for help, I'll never again get welfare. As long as I wasn't pregnant I'd just work and do what I can, but I'll never ask for help again. He came down in an airplane. He could hire an airplane to come down, check me out, fly back, but he can't give me more than eighteen dollars a month!

I took that for a while, and boy, it was painful! I just bought enough...like flour, and I hardly ever drank

⁵⁵ Effie would have walked approximately three miles round trip from town to where the garden was.

coffee, so we used tea, flour, sugar, macaroni, rice, or whatever I can get. I had to work hard to try to make ends meet.

By that time Andrew was getting around. He had his cast off and started walking around. So I was doing fine. There was a lot more to it, but I was determined to do what I had to do. That passed, and the next year Andrew got a job with the CCC.⁵⁶ It's some kind of construction that they give people that to make a little income. So, we were living good by then. I don't remember much, but we were still in town.

Anybody that wanted to cut brushes or something was working. They didn't get much, I forgot what it was. I was boarding the workers. I had about three or four boys living in my back room. Andrew was charging them a dollar a day, room and board, and I was doing all the cooking and all the work, cutting wood and getting water and doing the dishes, and everything for them, and I was getting nothing.⁵⁷

Then, there was a little more labor in town; they had to build a new hospital and everything. About 1940 my daughter got sick. She was three-years-old by then, and she got sick. She had meningitis, and there was nothing they could do about it back then. The doctor said, you just have to let her go. She was sick for a month, and she died. That was a very sad experience for me because, you know, that was my first baby - she was my treasure. It

⁵⁶ CCC was the Civilian Conservation Corps, in Alaska from 1933-42, under charge of the U.S. Forest Service. Most of the work was in the National Forests in south and southeast Alaska, but there was some activity in the Interior of Alaska, including development in Mt. McKinley Park. Some work in villages included construction of landing fields, shelter cabins, creation of dog and foot trails and work on public buildings, like schools. Later efforts assisted in preparing for war.

was...it was just...oh, I had all kinds of thoughts at that time, but I thought, well, it's the way God meant for it to be. I had three kids by that time.



Fig. 4.3.2 Effie and Andrew at Child's Funeral

By the time I had four kids, we had that big epidemic down Tanana. It started out with measles, and then, after you got over the measles, it turned into diarrhea. You would just get dehydrated. There was a foreign doctor in the hospital at that time, and if you went down and asked him for help, he just said, "No." He could not take any patients from up town, and he cannot go see any patients, because he didn't want to contaminate the hospital. So we had to deal with everything on our own. I was one of the first three that got sick in Tanana. It was in June, and I didn't know anything about measles at that time or the effects it had.

⁵⁷ Effie laughed when she told this story, even though it sounds like she was resentful.

We had been up in Steven Village, and when we came back, that's when I got sick. That was a very interesting trip that we made to Steven Village, but I'll come back to that later. When I got sick - nobody wanted to come around and help me. They were all scared, they said, "Oh, we don't want to get sick." So nobody came to help me.

There was one girl, a young teen-ager that was willing to work. The only one that would help me was Susie John. Money was very scarce - you didn't have a quarter to your name. I don't know how long she babysat for me and helped me. Andrew gave her twenty dollars. Boy! That was really big money at that time!

After I recovered from the measles, then everybody else was getting sick, so I was going from house to house, taking care of people the best I could. I would go up to Old Otto's, bless his heart, and get fish. I was taking fish broth, or fish, to people that really didn't have nobody to work for them.

Then my mother died, and my brother died.⁵⁸ There was about forty people in Tanana that died. Then my first son, who we called him Johnny Boy,⁵⁹ got sick, and he also died. There was nobody who came to our house when anybody got sick. They were so tired of people being sick. People just dealt with things by themselves.

I remember the steamboat had just come in, and there was a dance downtown. When the steamboat boys come to

⁵⁸ I don't know which brother died, but it had to have been a Joseph half-brother.

⁵⁹ Johnny Boy's real name was Andrew Bergman, but he was called by a nick-name. Using nick-names was very common.

town, that was cause for celebration, to dance and have a good time.

Just about midnight we sent for Andrew's cousin, who lived in back of us, in the next house. She came and sat with me while my son was dying. He was gasping for breath. I was trying to move him around, trying to help him breathe. He said...told me, "Mom, don't...I want to go." And, I thought...I hesitated. He said "It's beautiful," and that's all he said, then he started gasping for breath again, and I knew then that he was...that he...and then he died.

Marion⁶⁰ and I cleaned him up, and I just happened to have something nice to put on him. We were sitting at the bed, and we didn't know what to do...I mean, we just didn't have the strength to move him, we were so emotionally drained. Somebody came to the door, and it was Milton Nicholia.⁶¹ He said, "I came to see how you are - I heard your boy was sick." So here he was, a young man, he should be out having a good time, yet he took time to come to our house and check on my sick baby. I was so thankful for him. After we gave him a cup of tea, I had him move my boy to the back room where it was cooler, because we didn't have no other place to put people that died at that time. I am very grateful to Milton, and until he died, he was always a special friend to me after that.

It was a hard time for everybody, because there were so many people dying, and we were just doing the best we

⁶⁰ Marion Edwin, who was a participant in the Tanana Jukebox Project.

⁶¹ I asked Irene Nicholia Todd who Milton was, and she said that he was the brother of the late Rita Greenway, Mary Dick, Harry Nicholia, and Walter Nicholia.

could. Whoever was willing to dig a grave, they just dug the grave, and we were having funeral after funeral. They never had potlatches like we do now - they just didn't have the food, they didn't have the money. It was just a simple put-away. Sometimes we'd come to the house and have tea, or soup, or whatever you had. We had to learn to be strong. We had to learn to do things by ourselves - and I don't even know if we reported the deaths or anything. I guess they did, but I wasn't aware of it.

When somebody died, if the deacon was not available, I even prayed at the graveyard. I helped bury the dead.

I helped by being a mid-wife. I helped deliver children, and I took care of sick people. The worse part is right at the end. When it's over, you would just say the Lord's Prayer and finish like that. You did the best you could do with what you had and your power.

You would be surprised how much power you get when you really need it.



Fig. 4.3.3 Four Generations: Effie, Jessie, Shirley and Selena

Chapter 5 Move to Fairbanks

5.1 It Was Supposed to be a Temporary Move

In organizing the tapes that Effie recorded, I could not find the tape with this portion of the story on it, but Patty Elias had this transcript from work they had done together. Effie was telling Patty a story about the time leading up to the move to Fairbanks. Andrew was already working in Fairbanks as a carpenter at that time, and the family stayed behind in Tanana, until the opportunity to travel to Fairbanks arose. This chapter was compiled from several shorter transcripts, requiring editing.

I was selling my strips that fall of 1947, and we got the top price, which was fifty-five cents a pound, compared to today price, where fifteen dollars¹ is nothing, if you want to get ahold of some good strips.

The store was getting very impatient because I was running up a bill. I just got what I really needed, but there had been no payments coming in. My husband finally sent me eighty dollars.

Andrew stayed in Fairbanks until December, and when he came back, it was in the middle of the winter. The next year, he said, "I'm gonna go to Fairbanks and work again." I said, "I'm gonna go with you. I'm not gonna spend the summer down here alone again." I said, "If you go without me...that's it, I'm not gonna be alone anymore." So he said, "OK, you can come up in summer-time by boat if you get a chance."

¹ It is more difficult to find fish strips in 2010, but if you can, the cost is \$35/pound. The best salmon strips are made from Kings (Chinook), *Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*, which are the largest salmon. They usually arrive between Tanana and Rampart around the first week in July. Effie would have spent a lot of time preparing salmon strips, which require cutting, brining, hanging, drying and smoking.

Later, we heard that Jimmy Huntington was gonna come up by boat.² I was all ready to go. I got pieces of material and everything, whatever I can get my hands on, and made the kids new dresses, got them ready, and got a big box and put our stuff in there. When Jimmy came up to Tanana, I said, "I want to go with you."

I borrowed a poling boat from Joseph Nicholia. We tied the poling boat behind his boat and put the dogs in there. We put my kids in the bigger boat, and we came on up. We came all the way up the Tanana River and Chena River to Fairbanks. The water was sort of high, so we landed by the bridge³ and tied the dogs on the beach there. We stayed in Don Andon's house until we had a chance to get settled.⁴

I found out where my sister, Irene, was living. She had a little one-room shack, and we moved in there with her and stayed there one week while Andrew put up a tent in Graehl. Graehl was an out-of-the-way place. The only way you could get to it was by car. You had to go clean around, way up Illinois Street and come around Bentley Mall,⁵ then cut through Graehl. That's where we had our tent, and where we stayed for four months.

Everybody said, "Oh, that poor family is living in a tent." I never thought of it as being poor, because I was

² Jimmy Huntington was Effie's uncle, and he would have been coming from either Galena or the Koyukuk River. He would have taken the Yukon River to the Tanana, then the Chena River to Fairbanks.

³ There was only one bridge in Fairbanks, across the Chena River on Cushman Street.

⁴ Don Andon had children with a Native wife from Tanana. In Fairbanks he was a radio personality.

⁵ Bentley Mall was not there at that time. The road is now College Road. The Bentley family had a farm in that location. The other roads from which you can access Graehl currently (Minnie, 3rd Street, Old Steese) were not built in 1948.

used to living in a tent. In October we finally got a place to move into.



Fig. 5.1.1 Family and Friends, Probably 1949 or 1950

On the next big boat we had our stove brought up and one of the big sleds.⁶ So, we had a stove, at least. We were getting by pretty good, all right. Then we moved into a house. But I still had to carry water. We were burning coal, and I learned how to burn coal in a cook stove instead of wood. That was hard, because I didn't know how to keep the coal stove going good. And to me, it just stunk, the food tasted bum. It had that coal flavor.

We stayed on Third Street in Graehl as far as the road went, and from there it turned into Hamilton Acres, which was undeveloped.⁷ We moved our dogs up to Graehl, and we left them there through the summer and most of that winter. It was hard for me because Andrew didn't buy dog food. I had to go and get scraps from the Meat Market over on

⁶ Barges transport goods up and down the Tanana and Yukon Rivers to Fairbanks or Nenana.

⁷ I remember back in the 1950s that there were woods in Hamilton Acres and a few cabins.

Second Avenue,⁸ and I had to carry it all the way back up to Graehl. There was only the Cushman Bridge.⁹ I crossed the Cushman Bridge and walked all the way up Graehl and then tried to make something for the dogs to eat. It was hard, but I was used to hard work anyway. In those days - that was fifty-one years ago - when we first moved to Fairbanks, all the main buildings were on Second Avenue: the Meat Market; the grocery store; the Post Office; all the clothing store; restaurants, were all on Second Avenue. There were some on other streets, but the main shopping district was on Second Avenue. From town I used to have to walk across the bridge all the way up across the swinging bridge¹⁰ into Graehl.

5.2 Adjusting to Life in Fairbanks

Life was different. It was a very tough situation in Fairbanks. I didn't know anybody, and my husband was working every day. They were building Ladd Field. It's now Fort Wainwright, but it was Ladd Field at the time. They were building that up, and it was a life where I had to live off the store. Everything we ate came from the store.

I was beginning to miss my Native food. I wanted fresh fish, I wanted fresh meat, I wanted ducks and rabbits - you know, the stuff that we used for our food when we were on the river.

⁸ The streets downtown on the south side of the river were avenues, and the streets in Graehl were streets, so there is a Third Avenue, and a Third Street.

⁹ There are now seven public vehicle bridges across the Chena River through Fairbanks (Barnette Street Bridge not opened yet, in 2012).

¹⁰ The swinging bridge was a rope bridge that spanned Noyes Slough, which was always scary for us kids to walk across, as it really did swing when you walked across. Slaterville was on the west side of the bridge, and Graehl was on the east side, the slough dividing the two subdivisions. The main bridge was on Cushman Street, a steel truss bridge.

One day, I saw rabbit meat in the store. I thought it was like wild rabbit, but here it was a tame rabbit, and I didn't like it. It was like you were hungry all the time, because you're not getting your Native food. Well, it was just hard!

Then we moved into the house, but our dogs were separated from us. In the spring that year, I asked Walter Jewel¹¹ if we could stay in one of the little cabins that he had in Graehl. He said, "Well, it's awful small." But I said, "Well, if we get that, could we move our dogs in back of there, so that I could be close to the dogs?"

It was hard for me to go up were the dogs were and water them and go and cook for them, and we weren't watching them properly.

He said, "Yeah, you could move your dogs there." So we rented this little one-room cabin, and we stayed there until later on. I got another cabin a little bit above there, and we could keep the dogs right in the back yard.

Third Street in Graehl was just a dirt road,¹² mostly just used for delivery trucks, like the coal trucks. There was no good road, but you could get by with a car. So, we stayed there for a while.

Then we bought a little two-room frame house that had to be moved from town. We moved right behind Audrey O'Leary's, right by the old place where we had the one-room cabin.

¹¹ Walter Jewel and Maurice O'Leary owned a trucking company in Graehl. They were married to Native women and had lived interesting and entrepreneurial lives.

¹² Graehl consisted of Front Street, Second Street, Third and Fourth Streets, so Effie lived on Third Street in Graehl.

Audrey was sort of fascinated with me because I liked the outdoor life, and I liked to do things. She had a Jeep. Her husband used to cut wood at Nine Mile on Chena Hot Springs Road,¹³ so the road went as far as there.

I was getting very hungry for our food, and my children were getting old enough where they could watch each other.

Audrey and I used to go out there in the fall-time and we'd pretend we were...well, we really were hunting moose. We would just go up there and look around. That just fueled my appetite for being out. Every chance we got we went up that way to hunt moose and walk around.

When Audrey couldn't take me, her daughter Margie, who was a young woman, and a young man friend of hers would take me up there, and we'd go around. I was having experiences that I hadn't known before. Andrew would never take me out in the woods, so I was learning.

I knew people rubbed horns or something against a tree to make noise.¹⁴ So there was one evening just before dark, we walked down the road, and I had a stick. I rubbed it against a tree there, and we listened.

When you're out hunting like that you spent a lot of time just listening. I heard something hit, way back in the woods. So, we stayed there, and I rubbed a little bit more, and a while later I heard a very faint hit again.

I said, "Oh, heck, that moose is walking away from us...it's very faint." I threw down the stick that I was

¹³ There is a small road named O'Leary Road on the Chena Hot Spring Road around Nine Mile.

¹⁴ That is a way to call moose, as the males are curious to see if there is another male moose in the area.

using, and we walked back to the cabin. By then it was evening, and it was getting sort of dark.

The next morning, we got up and we walked back up to this hill where I heard this little thud on the tree. There was a moose track on the trail where we walked. It was just an old trail with mud, and you could see the moose had been there.

I was telling somebody about it - I didn't know that when you hear a moose hit the tree, you know, make noise, you're suppose to be very quiet, silent, and just wait. If you hear another faint noise afterwards, they're sneaking up on you. They're coming to investigate. They wanna see what that noise was. They're answering the noise. It was so faint, but if we had waited there a little longer, we could have spotted it, because there was a clearing.

I learned my first lesson on calling moose - that you just don't walk away when you hear an answering call. You just wait it out, because when he's sneaking up on you, he brushes his horns against grass or willows very faintly, because he's feeling you out.

5.3 Developing as a Hunter

In my early years I was learning so much about Mother Nature. My step-sister, Elsie, and her husband, Esau Roberts, were stationed at Standard when he was working on the railroad tracks. Standard is below Fairbanks someplace, about 10-20 miles, and they were stationed there.¹⁵ Esau liked that area so much that when he retired,

¹⁵ Standard Creek Road leads down to that area now. It starts at mile 7.4 of the Old Nenana Highway out of Ester, and it is possible to drive down about 17 miles. It is a popular road for wood cutting. I remember riding on the train. My memory was that we went all the way to Cantwell to visit family, but mom told me that the train ride was only as far as Standard.

and the Railroad didn't have a camp there anymore, they bought or leased a place, and they made a house there. He moved his family down there when the kids were small. I don't know why they weren't in school.

In the fall-time, you just couldn't keep me home! Anywhere I could get a ride, I'd go hunting. I could trust my kids enough that they could take care of each other, and I would try to get a ride.

In those days, we could take a freight train for maybe a dollar or a dollar and a half. They would drop you off anywhere you wanted.

So, one year I took my little kids and I went down to Standard for a dollar and a half and went to visit Esau and Elsie. This was after hunting season when there was just a little snow on the ground. I told them that I came down there to hunt rabbits or spruce hens, or willow grouse, or whatever I can get. The older I was getting, the more yearning I had for Native foods.

In those days people didn't ship fish and meat from the villages, like they do now. It was hard for us to get Native food. So, I went down there, and Elsie was willing to take care of my daughter. They just loved my little daughter, Dee Dee, so they were glad to take care of her while I took her son, who was a young teen-ager. I took him and I said, "We're gonna go hunting."

It was after moose hunting season, so I didn't take a rifle, I just took a .22,¹⁶ and we started walking. Around Standard they had rolling hills. You could go for miles along the edge of the hills.

We were walking down there, and I saw porcupine tracks because of the fresh snow. I looked at it, and I figured out which way it went. It's hard to tell with a porcupine track - their hands and feet are round. We had to look see which way the fingernails are going, if there's any tracks showing. You can also look to see if the tail is dragging on the ground, whether it's behind the tracks or ahead of the tracks - then you can tell which direction the porcupine went.

We followed the porcupine up the hill. Pretty soon it went into a cave. There was nice rolling hills, and he had a little cave in there.

Well, I didn't know what to do. I had heard stories when I was growing up, when we would listen to people talk. I heard stories about how you could pull a porcupine out of a hole. So I said, "Oh, I think I know."

I got a willow about four or five feet long, about as big as your finger. At the end, I left a little fork, about a half a inch long on each side of the fork.

I took this willow and I stuck it in the hole and keep poking around until I felt this soft spot. I started twisting this stick clockwise, and started pulling on it, and I could feel that I was pulling something out. I backed up and pulled the stick, and I pulled out a porcupine from the hole.

When you start twisting the stick with the forked end, the porcupine winds itself around the tip. I don't know, someone might worry what it was doing to the poor

¹⁶ A .22 is a small caliber gun that is good for shooting small game.

porcupine, but all I was thinking was, "I got something to eat!"

I pulled the porcupine out of the hole. Then Norman said, "What are we gonna do?" I was holding the porcupine still, keeping pressure on the stick.

I told Norman, "Shoot it in the head." We don't normally shoot porcupines, we just hit them over the head. But since he was young and didn't know if he could do that, I just told him, "Just shoot it in the head."

OK, boy! I had my porcupine, and I had the experience of doing something that I had only heard about. Frankly, when you hear stuff like that, you don't think much about it.

Then Norman said, "Well, what are we gonna do? Let's go ask Daddy." We didn't need to ask Daddy!

We just had to do the best we can with what we were doing! So, we built a fire. I burnt all the quills off so that we could put it in the packsack. We took the guts out. When you take the guts out and burn all the quills, the porcupine is not very big to put in your sack.

We started walking again, and we saw another porcupine track. We followed it, and we studied the tracks to see which way it went. Again, we followed it to a hole. I done the same thing, and I pulled my second porcupine out of a hole.

Boy, that was great! We took care of that porcupine and kept on walking. We kept on walking, and we saw another. It was not right away; it took maybe an hour or so between. I got my third porcupine that day out of a hole.

That was the experience of my life! I was just amazed what a person can do if they are really hungry.

A long time ago, people didn't used to kill porcupines, only if they're really hungry, because the porcupine is a very slow moving animal. Even an old lady or a person who is sick could get one, and they can use it for food. Natives didn't bother with a porcupine unless it was an emergency. But to me, it was emergency - living in Fairbanks without no kind of Native food.

So, it was just a feather in my cap to come back late that afternoon with three porcupines in my sack. That was just awesome!

The next day we went out again. Norman said he was tired. I guess they never hiked as much as they should, even they were young kids.

We went to our left, down into the creek bed. We saw a porcupine up a tree. We chopped down that tree; it was just a little tree. We chopped that down and got that porcupine.

Norman said, "I don't feel good. I'm getting' tired." So, we just got that one porcupine, and then we went back to camp. I don't know if it was exposure or something, but he got sick. I didn't know why he was weak. People didn't go to hospital all the time, and here he was getting TB.¹⁷ He died a couple of years later with TB. I felt bad because I made him walk with me. I didn't make him - he walked with me because he wanted to.

¹⁷ Tuberculosis

Boy, it was nice to go back to Fairbanks with my treat. Of course, I gave one to Esau and then and then took the rest back to Fairbanks with me.

The next year, I wanted to do it again. Around that time, Carrie Joseph from Stevens Village came over to Fairbanks with her little boy. She had no place to stay, so even though we had a little two-room shack, I told her she could sleep in the kitchen on a cot, her and her boy, until she finds a job or gets settled.¹⁸

It was fall-time again, and I was getting antsy to start going out. One day I told her, "I'm gonna go down to Standard. I'm gonna see if I can get rabbits or something."

I was getting ready, and I was taking a couple little kids. My youngest children were getting along, so I could take them with me. I was getting ready to go, and Carrie said, "I wanna go with you."

I didn't have no money. She didn't have no money, but I said, "OK." I don't know how I got my stuff and all our food down to the depot. I paid her ticket to go down to Standard with me, a round-trip ticket for a dollar and a half.

My son was old enough to walk with me, so the next day I said I was gonna walk down the railroad track, because I heard there was a lake back there someplace. I wanted to find it because it was still during the moose hunting season. Carrie said, "Well, I wanna go with you." I said,

¹⁸ It was not uncommon for Effie and Andrew to open their home to guests from the villages, especially around the March dog races.

"OK." And then Elsie's little boy says, "Well, I wanna go with you."

OK, how could you go hunting with three, four kids trailing after you? I said OK, so we walked down the railroad track, and we walked a long ways. By the way the hills looked, I figured maybe this was where that lake was. We got off the railroad track and went back into the woods. The kids were getting tired, so we sat down and had lunch. We were resting the kids where there was a lot of moss, and against a spruce tree we took a little nap. When you're out like that, the fresh air really gets to you. While we were sitting there we were listening all the time. You don't talk, you don't make noise, you listen. When you need to talk, you just whisper or make signs to each other.

Then we heard something in the brushes. We listened, and we heard different noise. It was something over to our right, but I didn't know what it was. Then we heard a grunting sound and some things rubbing against each other. Pretty soon, you could hear something like water splashing. I told those kids, "Now you keep real quiet and don't move, you stay right here. I'm gonna walk over to where this noise is."

I left them, and I walked over that way and looked all around for every little movement, every little thing that could be something. Then I came to a little clearing, and there was nothing. Nothing! I didn't hear no noise again. I went back to the kids, and I said, "We got to get out of here," because I really didn't understand what those noise was about. I said, "You keep real quiet and stay close together," and we walked back to the railroad track and we

went back to camp. I don't know...it was a very funny experience. I must have told somebody what we went through that day, the experience we had. They never said nothing.

When I got back to town I told my husband about these strange noises we heard. I know that bears in the fall-time make noise when they hear you and they're trying to distract you or scare you.

He said, "Well, don't you go out in the woods anymore." That's all he said to me. I was the one that was trying to get something to eat, and he never done nothing with his weekends.

Way afterwards I was telling that story and somebody told me, "Ah, that's a porcupine." In the fall-time when the porcupine are looking for each other, that's the way they send messages. Just like when a bull moose is calling for a cow, he rubs his horns and stuff. Well, that was the porcupine's message, looking for a mate. And shucks, it was just like a joke then, because here I was so scared. I got the kids out of there so quietly, and everything. But at least I know the kids could behave (laughs). That's something else I learned about Mother Nature.

All these little things that happen when you're out in the woods...you listen to them and then you identify what it is and you will understand. That was an experience that I would not have, if I had not gone down to Standard. It just happened to be a good place where the porcupine settled in that mountainside. That's the way I was. Every opportunity I had, we used to get out and do things.

5.4 Hunting Moose or Caribou

Effie loved to hunt as much as she loved running dogs. Once the hunting bug bit her she had to be out in the woods, or along an Interior highway, or on a river in the fall. Not only was she seeking to provide food for her family, hunting is where she found the freedom and pleasure that she had always yearned for. Effie loved camping, cooking on a fire, walking around looking for animals, and she was a good shot. She had five notches on her rifle, one for each moose that she brought home. Going hunting was a great adventure for her, which often meant making travel arrangements with friends who had a car, truck or boat.

One time, Jimmy Huntington was at our house and we were talking. I was telling him about my effort, trying to get a moose. He said, "Why fool around here? You'll never get nothing just fooling around town." The men could go further than I could just bumming a ride around town.

He said, "Why don't you go to Huslia and hunt where you know you're gonna get something?" It was in the fall-time, and I didn't even have a good gun. I had an old gun that was just a hand-me-down. So I started working regular at a laundry shop, and I was gonna get a steady income.¹⁹

I said, "Well, the first thing I'm gonna do is get me a rifle. I'm gonna get me a new rifle, and I'm gonna start right now planning on a vacation."

I went to Montgomery Ward and I ordered this rifle on a payment plan because I was just starting to work, and I didn't have that much money. Anything I wanted, I had to get with my own money. Up until then I was just working out of my own home, sewing or making things for people. I was busy all the time, but I was not making that much

¹⁹ Effie went to work at Pioneer Cleaners & Laundry, on Wendell and Lacey, owned by Ron and Mary Eberhart.

money. So, when I started a regular job, in 1949 I got my gun. In one year, I knew I was gonna get a vacation.

I planned my vacation for September, so I can go hunting. Everybody knew I was gonna go. My husband knew it too, but he didn't say nothing. Jim Huntington was my uncle, and Andrew knew he could trust me to go hunting with him. When my year was up and I went on vacation, I went up there. We went to Galena, and then went to Huslia.²⁰

When I got there, Jimmy asked me, "How much time do you have?" I said, "I don't have too much time. I have to really be back Tuesday." The planes were going to Huslia only twice a week. Gee, that's not much time. Jimmy said, "OK, tomorrow morning I'm going to take you hunting up the Huslia River." The river is really crooked, so I didn't know which way was downriver or upriver.

The next morning we got up and we left. Roger Huntington²¹ went with us, and they took a canoe because they were going to hunt ducks along the way. It was September 12th or 13th by then.

We were just about half an hour out of Huslia when we saw this big moose swimming across the river. He landed on a cut bank, and tried to get up the bank, but it was too steep. After he tried a couple of times, he got back into the water and started swimming back across the river where he came from.

I said, "I want that moose." That was the first bull moose I saw within shooting range. Uncle Jimmy said, "Oh

²⁰ Galena is on the Yukon River, Huslia is located on the Koyukuk River, north of the Yukon River, downriver from Galena. Jimmy Huntington talked about establishing the community of Huslia in his book *On the Edge of Nowhere* as told to Lawrence Elliott, Epicenter Press, 1992.

²¹ Roger Huntington is the son of Sidney Huntington, Jimmy's older brother.

no, he's too big...you want one smaller than that."

I said, "No! That's my first moose that I ever saw. I want it." So, we watched it swim back across the river. We were just idling the boat and watching it.

I said, "I'm gonna get it." The moose was approaching a sand bar, so we landed the boat below where he was gonna land. We watched it, and it was so exciting! Here was this great big bull running across the sand bar, and Uncle Jimmy said, "Now don't you shoot until I tell you to."

The moose was running across the sandbar, and when he got close to the bank where the willows started, they said, "Now!"

I took a really good aim and I shot. The moose was still running! My first instinct was to put a bullet in the gun and shoot again.

Roger said, "You got him."

Instantly I thought, "How could I, it's still on foot?" It was running, but pretty soon, it just leaned over to one side and plopped right down on the ground. I had shot him right in the back, in the middle. I didn't know because I wasn't as smart an outdoorsman. Roger could see that it was hit, and it was just running on reflexes, away from us. It landed right on the edge of the willows. Oh golly! That was a thrilling experience!

We got the ax and the knife and we went up to it. Uncle Jimmy told me, "Cut some brushes." When you get a moose you always cut a bunch of willows or brushes or spruce boughs or something and put down before you lay the meat on the ground. That way the meat is clean, it don't get sandy. It doesn't pick up all the...I want to say

"dlot"²²...all the sticks and leaves and stuff that's on the ground. You lay the meat on the willow branches so that it will get air from the bottom, not just flat on the ground.

I wanted to skin that moose - I wanted to get my hands in there. I wanted to do something, and here I just have to cut brush. I thought that I was being cheated out of working on my kill.

Uncle said, "Well, we're gonna just leave it here." So, we cut more brushes and just covered it, because you can't leave anything like that laying around because of the crows. The crows would be around there, getting their fill. When crows get on something, they leave a mess, pooping as they're eating. They would get all the meat dirty, so we had to cover it real good.

We went up the river a little more, and went back to a lake they knew and got some ducks. There was one goose, so Roger took the canoe, and he was going back to the lake to get that one goose.

Uncle Jimmy and I stayed back to prepare for the evening. While Uncle Jimmy was putting up the lean-to, and getting the fire started, he told me to clean three ducks. I plucked the three ducks right on the river bank there, and took the guts out, and I took them over to where Uncle Jimmy was preparing the camp.

He took an onion and bacon, and he put them inside of the duck, and put it on a skinny stick about two feet long to barbeque. He stuck the stick in the ground where it faced the heat, and you turn the stick around so that the

²² This is a Denaakk'e Athabascan description.

duck will roast on all sides. While we were doing that, Roger came back.

While he was walking back, and I guess he was brushing the canoe against the sticks. We were sitting there waiting for dinner to cook. It was getting dark. We heard a noise. We were quiet, and talked in a low, hush voice. We heard something in the brushes, and Uncle said, "That's probably a moose."

Then pretty soon a moose start rubbing its horns on a tree, right where we were, but out of sight. It was getting dark, and he out of sight - we couldn't see it. He brushed his horns against the tree real hard to attract our attention or something.

Uncle said, in Native, "Get away from us, we don't need meat, we don't need you today." People respect the animals, when they talk to them, they talk to them in our language. Like if you see a bear, you just try to be calm, and say, "Get away from us," or, "You ought'a be ashamed of yourself...there's only women here," and stuff like that, but that's another story.

So, he told this moose to get away, but he kept on rubbing his horns in the trees right around where we are, and Uncle keep saying, "Get away, come back again some other time." He just talked to it like he would a person.

Finally, the moose walked away. I guess he wasn't going to get the response he wanted from us. It was time to eat by then.

We ate our supper, and oh, that was good! I told Jimmy, "I can't eat this whole duck."

He said, "Sure you can." He said, "Just give it a try again, I know you can eat the whole thing."

So I start eating, and it took me a long time, but I ate that whole roasted duck. With all the fresh air and everything, I had a good appetite, I guess. Then we put out our sleeping bags. They put me in the middle, and we slept that night.

The next morning we got up, and we started back to Huslia. We passed the place where I got my moose. I said, "Well, aren't we gonna pick it up?"

Uncle Jimmy said, "Na. Leave it there." Oh, Golly! I don't know how they do things there. I didn't like leaving my meat there. I was so proud of it.

We got back to Huslia, and then Uncle Jimmy told this bunch of young boys there, "You take my boat, and go up..." he named the spot on the river, he say "You go up there. We got a moose on the beach. Bring it down." So these boys went up the river and brought the meat down, but they didn't bring the head.

I was sorta disappointed in that, because the horns was *really* big! I measured the span of the horns, and it was as far as I could spread my arms out, and that's about five feet. There was still six or seven inches more. I took my rifle and I put it by the horns, but my rifle was too small to get the width. I never did find out how wide it was, but it was at least five feet and a half.

I *wanted* that horn so bad, but I didn't say nothing. Then the steamboat, George Black,²³ went by bringing freight

²³ A search of Alaska's Digital Archives, Rasmuson Library, UAF, shows the crew of the George Black, including Gregory Kokrine, uncle of Andrew Kokrine, Gregory Kokrine Collection, UAF-897-4.

up the Koyukuk River, and Uncle talked to the pilot. He said, "How much would you charge to bring that moose horns up to Fairbanks for Effie?"

"Oh," he said, "five dollars." That sounded just wonderful! But I'd have to hire a boat to go up the beach to get it, and come back, and I was running out of time. I had to get back to Fairbanks.

I left the horns there. My prize possession, I left there. That spot is sort of a landmark for people now. They say, "Well, that is where Effie got her moose." So, people still remember my spot - that big sandbar where I got my moose (laughs). And, that moose was BIG!

When Uncle Jimmy and them cut the moose up, they quartered it with the skin on. First, you take the guts out of it and give it air, that's very important. When you leave the skin on for a while it tenderizes the meat. So, the meat was quartered, then covered with brushes and left, so that sort of tenderized the meat. Even it was a big moose, it was very good. Oh, it was good!

I spent all that day getting my meat ready. I cut the bones and saved the marrow, and brought that home to Fairbanks. Boy, that moose sure didn't last long. For a change, I could give the kids all the meat they want to eat. We could eat meat three times a day, it don't matter. We were getting our fill on Native food!

All my kids ate everything I gave them, no matter what it was, they ate whatever I put before them, because we couldn't afford to be choosy. Right now, they have hamburgers, and pizza, they've got everything. Children now-a-days - I don't think none of them really like Native

food, because a lot of them have never had the opportunity to eat some. But in the villages, the main thing is our meat. That's what we call blessings. I was blessed with the fruits of our Earth. That just reminded me of a story of Dotson'sa.

5.5 Dotson'sa Story (stories are shared when it starts getting dark in the fall)

"You know Dotson'sa,²⁴ in the Native stories, he had a great ability to be the big joker, the laziest guy, the smartest guy, and he was a brunt of all jokes, but he done a lot of wise things, too. Dotson'sa is Mr. Crow - and if I talk about Mr. Crow, or Dotson'sa, you could understand that I'm talking about the same thing. Anyway, it reminds me of his blessing that he forgot to be thankful for.

One time there was a man - he was a bachelor, and he lived alone. He had a pet wolf. They were companions. Whenever he needed meat, well, he tell his pet wolf to go out and bring a moose to him, or he'd kill a moose for him. In those days, a long time ago, all animals and humans used to communicate together. They could all talk, and the humans and the animals were friends, they had the same language. So this wolf and this man got along real good as partners, and, Mr. Crow, Dotson'sa, heard about them. He heard about this wolf that could kill a moose for his boss, his friend, his companion. So he went to visit them.

Dotson'sa didn't have good clothes. He didn't have a wife to sew for him, so most of his clothing was what people gave him, discards, and he didn't have nothing good. He was lazy, too lazy to do anything for himself. He'd rather beg, or have someone give him stuff. He was just

like a big joke! But still, people had to respect each other.

So, he went to look for this man. He went either down river or up river, wherever this man was staying, and he come to him, and he said "I would like to borrow your wolf to get me a moose."

This man said, "Oh, no, no, no. I respect him too much to loan him out to just anybody."

Dotson'sa said, "Well, I'm not anybody, I'm your friend." He kept after him for days. He kept on begging the man to please let the wolf help him. Everybody always ends up giving in to Dotson'sa in the end.

So one day the man said, "Well, OK, go ahead and take Mr. Wolf, but if he does catch anything for you, you treat him to the best of the meat. That's all he'll ask for, just a treat."

When a wolf kills a moose, the first thing they'll do is tear out the throat of the moose, and eat the tongue. The wolf was used to that, and so he went out, and he killed a moose for Dotson'sa. Dotson'sa was so greedy, he just started eating, and eating, and he forgot all about the wolf.

The wolf just sat there, away from Dotson'sa, waiting for his treat. When Dotson'sa finally got full, he remembered, and he said, "Oh, I have to give him something." So, he took the gut and he threw it at the wolf, and smacked the wolf across the face with it, and he said, "That's all you deserve."

²⁴ Raven or Crow

Again, Mr. Crow forgot to share his blessing, for the opportunity to have this wolf kill the meat for him. The wolf was very hurt that he wasn't respected, he wasn't treated right, so he tromped away.

The wolf never came back to his partner, but his partner knew he was out there - he could see him. He said "What's the matter? What happened? How is it going? Did you get your meat?"

But Mr. Wolf never said nothing. He was still hurt from the way he was treated. Finally, Mr. Wolf told him what happened, and he said, "I can't be a friend of a man any more. I can't do it. I'm just gonna have to separate myself from your life, and just concentrate on being an animal."

So the man told Mr. Wolf, "OK, in the future, if somebody is hungry, or starving, leave some meat where it could be found, so it will feed these people." A long time ago, when people ran out of food, when they run out of meat, they would have nothing to eat.

The man said, "Make sure that you help the people that needs the help." So, I guess the saying goes for a long time, that when people are really starving they'll find a part of an animal, you know, half eaten and left on the road for them to find.

So, when this man saw Dotson'sa, he told him how sad that he made the wolf, and that he broke their partnership.

5.6 The Tradition of Stories

There's all kinds of stories that remind of the life that we lived. You have to really remember these stories, but I don't remember too many stories that are important.

The winter time was the only time that we used to tell stories, when everybody settled down. After supper people started to tell stories. I was so active all day long, going, going, going, that when people settled down to tell stories I'd go to sleep. I missed out on a lot of good story telling time when people were still doing that.

When I got a little older, I was separated more from the old storytellers. My father died when I was twelve, and I went three years without hearing my Native language, or hearing Native stories. When I came back at fifteen,²⁵ I didn't have an opportunity to just sit and hear stories.

What little I know, I've had to put together, with what I heard before I was twelve, and the things I learned after I was fifteen. It's important to be around old people, because they reminisce and talk, and you learn how to do things. They talk about their hunting trip, or what happened, and hearing those stories being told, you learn by their experience, and what they went through. You learn about the nature of the animals, how they behave, and what not to do, and to do, and everything. So, all your life, if you listen to people, that's the interesting part. You're learning something, but you have to be wise enough to absorb the useful things that you hear.

Later, when my children were big enough, I'd be gone every weekend during hunting season. I'd be on the road, or doing something. During hunting season, I was never home, except the days that I worked. I was working six days a week, and sometimes I was working seven days a week. On

²⁵ Effie was going to school at Eklutna during those years that she was gone, and separated from her family and her culture.

that one day off, I was out on the road. When I did take a vacation, I would try to get my vacation during hunting season.

5.7 More Hunting Stories

Later on, I had a girlfriend.²⁶ She was eleven years older than me, and she was a big heavy woman, but she could drive. We used to go out and do things on my vacation. We went down Denali Highway, and we went up to Eagle, and we covered so much territory. We spent a lot of our time down the Denali Highway. I got several moose down on the Denali Highway, and there was a caribou crossing every once in a while, but it was really good moose country.



Fig. 5.7.1 Edith Smith and Effie with a Bull Moose

²⁶ Edith Smith, whose story was written by Willie Lou Warbelow, published in 1993. *Child of the Equinox: The Edith Smith Story*. Effie and Edith continued to be hunting buddies until age prevented Edith from driving. She lived to be in her eighties. She had always been a rotund woman, but she lost some of her height as she aged. She could barely see over her steering wheel. She was the only grandmother figure that we kids had, as our biological grandparents passed away years earlier. Andrew Kokrine, Sr. was the last one alive. He stayed with us in Graehl before he passed in the 1950s.



Fig. 5.7.2 Edith and Effie out Camping

When we first went down the Denali Highway, we could only go as far as Clearwater, because they were just building that bridge crossing the Clearwater, and that's how far you could go with the car. From there, it was a reserved area on one side, and open area on the other side.

The Denali Highway from the McLaren River to Clearwater is on a ridge, and it's straight down on one side. There's a pond or lake, and they connect to each other, and it's one big body of water that runs all the way down. That's the open area. The only way you can get to the other side of the open area is to cross at the Clearwater. When the Road Commission was working there, they made it narrow enough so we could cross.

I spent several years exploring that area. The lakes were not like they are right now, sort of drying out. There was a beaver dam crossing one of those lakes, or the slough; in some places it was wide, in some places it was narrow. This beaver dam crossed half of one lake to hold back the beaver dam waters.

When a beaver builds a house, they build a dam to hold back the water so they don't flood out the winter time.

They have to have a pool of water when they build their house, so that their opening don't freeze up. The beaver house is a big dome, made out of mud and sticks, and on the bottom is an outlet. Usually beavers have two outlets, one in the back, one in front for like, emergency. Inside of there they have a bedroom, and a resting place and stuff in there, with little shelves-like. So the water is very important for the beaver.

There was a beaver dam there, and after the people started going around there, the beavers moved away, or else maybe somebody trapped them, I don't know.

We used to go down there and hunt. One time, I went down there with my brother-in-law, Roger Svoboda, and Buzzy.²⁷ They were going down there to go hunting, and I had the next day off, so I said, "Can I go with you?"

You know, nobody really wanted a woman hanging around them, but I went with them. We traveled all night, and we got down there the next day. We could only go as far as Clearwater. We were fooling around there, looking around in the field, and we saw two caribou across the water. We wanted to get those caribou, but we had to go way down the Clearwater and then walk all the way up on the other side. By that time, we'd lose sight of those caribou, or they could be miles away.

I don't know what prompted me, I was just dumb I guess. I said "Well, there's a beaver dam right over here, we could cross."

²⁷ Roger Svoboda was married to Effie's sister Isabel. Buzzy Edwin was the son of Lee and Marion Edwin. Marion was the cousin of Andrew mentioned earlier who helped when Effie and Andrew's son died.

Roger had to be foolish, too, because he said, "OK, let's try it." So, we went over to that old beaver dam, which was starting to get weak by then. Roger walked across, and it was flimsy, then Buzzy walked across, and then I walked across last.

We went a little ways, and we come to a little rise, and we saw the caribou there. I shot, because I was behind them, and they couldn't see. I could see from on top of this little rise. I shot the caribou, and then Roger and Buzzy start shooting, but they didn't have the good view that I had. So I just went and shot that one, too - the other caribou they were shooting at.

We went over to where the caribou were. I never thought we were foolish, or crazy; all we wanted was to get across to the caribou when we crossed that beaver dam. But now, there was nothing left of the beaver dam! How foolish we were. A beaver dam might be strong, but you should never try to cross it, unless it's very fresh, still in use and kept in good condition.

We got back across, and then Roger told me, "Go back to the highway and bring the pick-up down to the Clearwater." I always did what I was told (laughing while telling this story). The pick-up was a mile or two away.

I got back up to the highway and I started walking, and I thought to myself, "What am I going to do? I don't know how to drive." Roger had told me to get the pick-up, and bring it down. I thought, "Oh, my God, what am I gonna do?"

I kept on walking. I got to the pick-up. I thought, "Well, I'm just gonna have to wait here." Traffic was

going back and forth. Pretty soon a pick-up came by, and they wanted to know if I need help.

I said, "Yeah, my brother-in-law told me to move this truck." I said, "I can't even drive!" I said, "Will one of you please drive this truck down to Clearwater for me?"

They did, and it was a great big joke. Here I am, going to get the truck, and I was dumb enough to say I would when I can't drive, but we got the truck down there.

They were carrying the meat to the truck, and Roger told me to cook supper.

What am I supposed to cook in? We didn't have no tools. All we had was just our snacks and our coffee pot. So, I took a stick and I roasted some meat by camp fire, and we ate, then we started back to Fairbanks.

I had my husband's sleeping bag, so I just put it in back of the truck, and rolled up inside of it, and slept most of the way back to town.

So, Roger and I got our caribou. All my experience in hunting - if you look at it - there's a lot of funny things that happened. We got a lot of moose and caribou at different times being out on the road, on the Denali Highway. I've got a lot of beautiful memories of that road. After the bridge got in at Clearwater we went further, and we explored more ground.

In 1960, before the moose-hunting season was open, I wanted to go hunting down the Denali Highway. They were just putting in the bridge at Clearwater, and I wanted to

see how the job was progressing. I was telling my friends²⁸ about how beautiful the Denali Highway was - what a good ride it was, and they said, "Yeah, let's go." I was so happy to go, and get on Denali Highway.

We were driving in a light car, and you could travel pretty fast. We got down there in about four hours' time. We were around the McLaren River. There's water on one side, and lakes and swamps on the other side. The river runs near a ridge, and we were driving along, and just before we got to McLaren water, there was a big tent on the side of the road, and a couple of smaller ones all around.

In those days, people used to have four-wall tents and you erected it with poles. So we stopped and visited. It was Harry Panik and his wife's camp. Harry was working on road construction at the Clearwater bridge, and his whole family always used to go with him. And here they were, and she was washing clothes, getting ready, and she said they're going back into town. Washing clothes by hand, and it was just such a homey place, and such a welcoming place. Harry Panik's wife was a very kind woman, and I really liked her. She was easy to talk to.

While she was changing clothes, the young boys said that they were gonna carry in the caribou meat that they had killed a couple days before. They were letting it sit in the air, so it would be easier to carry.

So they were going to walk back there, and I thought about going along. I never thought of the danger, or

²⁸ The friends were not identified, but I found hand-written notes that Andrew and Lee Kalloch were with Effie on this trip. Dee and Mary recollect that Effie would go hunting with anyone who had a vehicle and liked to ride.

thought anything of it. I wasn't thinking about nothing, I said I wanted to go. My husband said, "Go ahead and go." Then Mrs. Panik said, "Oh, I'll go with you." So she hurried and finished her laundry and we started back after the boys. We followed them up there, about close to an hour or so back to the site.

The boys cut off the legs of the caribou and made up their packs. Mrs. Panik was taking her time, and she took the caribou legs that the boys threw away. She cut the little caribou foot, and cut the toes in half. Then, she cut in between the toes, not quite an inch long, and cut that piece out. She put it in her mouth. So I done the same thing to another caribou and I put it into my mouth. She said people used to do that long time ago, you know, to keep from getting hungry and to keep up their strength²⁹. If you have to have a snack, it doesn't matter what it is as long as it's edible and you use it. That was something new for me to learn. I thought that was a pretty good thing to learn, just in case of emergency.

5.8 Last Hunt on the Denali Highway

One of the last times I was up on the Denali Highway was with my son-in-law, and my daughter.³⁰ We went as far as McLaren. From there on it's a reserve area on one side, so we came back up on the side road by McLaren.

We seen some caribou on the south side of the mountain. The highway is on the north side of that mountain. We were going along real slowly, and watching.

²⁹ Another time that Effie told this story she said that while you are dressing out game, that snack can keep you from getting too hungry if you can't stop and take the time to cook.

³⁰ Mary and Jerry Pearson, Sr.

When you see a caribou against the sky-line, you could see it real easy. When we were leaving McLaren, I said, "Wait! Wait!" And sure enough, there were caribou horns against the sky line there.

We watched them, and pretty soon the caribou came down the mountain, on the side we were on. We waited. We backed up the car to where we thought the caribou might come down. They were milling around, not in a hurry to go anywhere.

Jerry and I both took our guns, and went off on a little gravel area where we could see good, and we waited. In that area it is all hills, with hardly any flat area. Pretty soon, they came out to us.

Jerry got one, and I got one. I was about seventy-five, I was at least seventy-five-years-old when I shot my last caribou. We have a picture of me carrying out the head. I told Jerry, "I want to do this all by myself."

I rolled the caribou over, and I cleaned it, and skinned it, and cut it up, and carried it down to the car all by myself. And that was the last time that I had strength enough to do anything like that.



Fig. 5.7.3 Effie with Caribou

The next couple years, we didn't go hunting, and then I went out caribou hunting with my son-in-law again. I was getting older.

I had killed a caribou, and cleaned it out the last time we went hunting. This time I shot a caribou, also. It fell down, but it was still alive. I had to go shoot it again. I went up to the caribou, and I just couldn't pull the trigger. I told my son-in-law, "You do it for me." I guess the impact of what happened was starting to tell on me, because from then on, I never went hunting anymore. I never killed anything. I don't even want to go bird hunting anymore, and I used to love to go spruce hen hunting, or rabbit hunting. Now I don't shoot anything because I was so frightened. I just can't do it anymore. I

don't mind the hunting part, I don't mind the killing part, but I hate to see anything suffer.

Since then, I haven't gone hunting down that road at all, and I really miss that.³¹

A couple of years ago, we were supposed to go down there and pick blueberries, but I never did. My health has not been too good. I stay away from where other people are hunting. I don't want to be in the way.

I worked for about twenty years in a job, where I was getting regular vacations. There was a lot of times I went to Tanana, and went up on the Yukon River, and went down to the Novi River. I was a serious hunter (laughs).

Down on the Novi River, I got a moose, I don't know, one or two moose there.

On the Yukon River, we would ride up river, and it was so beautiful. Even if we didn't see nothing, or we didn't get nothing, it was just nice to be able to go up there, where I first started my married life. That's where we used to stay for the most part. I forgot how beautiful that river could be.

So, right now, I still go back that way. I still, to this day, go back on the river. Toward the end of my husband's life he started to go with me. For a long time there, he didn't go with me. Later, when he was getting old, and he was getting sick, I guess he figured he should trail along with me.³²

³¹ The Denali Highway and the Tangle Lakes area is a special and sacred place to our family.

³² There was a transition point where Effie became much more independent by working for wages and going on hunting trips without her husband. Getting time away from work and family was liberating.

Chapter 6 Dog Sled Racing

6.1 Effie Becomes a Champion

Effie Kokrine went from obscurity to local celebrity in three years of dog racing in Fairbanks. She was still a quiet and shy village woman from Tanana when she entered her first race in Fairbanks. In a tape that was recorded on 4-18-2000, she told this abbreviated version of her race experience.

When we first moved to Fairbanks in 1949, we brought the dogs up. You probably think "Well, why would they bother to bring the dogs?" Well...we still had the North American and stuff here in Fairbanks, so I guess that was our purpose for bringing the dogs. Dogs were just part of our life, and I just couldn't see myself living without them. Anyway, we brought our dogs up, and we had about nine. I worked on them, feeding and training. I never went no place, because my kids were small and I stayed home all the time. My husband used to go out at night, and he knew many people that I never met.

It was March, and one day he came home from being gone, and he said, "You're gonna get in the women's race." I said "ME? I don't know the trail." I just knew this area, when Hamilton Acres was nothing. We used to drive dogs up Hamilton Acres and go up around the post, and go up the Chena, but that's the only area I knew.

I said, "I can't get in the women's race, I don't know the trail." At that time they used to start the race under the Cushman Bridge, when they had that old bridge there, they'd come up the Chena, then go up Noyes Slough.

Andrew said, "All you have to do is go up Noyes Slough, and then at College Cleaners, go up the bank, to

your left." Well, where *is* College Cleaners? I don't know no trail that goes up the bank from the Noyes¹⁷³ Slough.

He said, "Just go...the dogs will take you." I was in doubt. I don't know why, but I said "OK." I guess because I love to drive dogs.

The day of the race I was throwing up, I was so nervous. I heaved, and heaved, and heaved. At the starting line, I was sick to my stomach.

There was a woman with borrowed dogs who started ahead of me. Just as I got up on the Noyes Slough and started up the slough, here she was on the side of the road, and she started to holler, "Don't come up here, don't come up here." What was she hollering at me for?

The dogs got distracted, so they turned off. We didn't have no ice brakes on the sled at that time,¹⁷⁴ so we just had to try to do the best we can, and try to get the dogs back on the road. I finally got the dogs back on the road, and we started up the Slough. The leader knew where the bank was, because Andrew ran the trail before in a preliminary race. He said, "When you get on that road, just stay on that road and keep a-goin' until you come to the rail-road trestle, and then you turn to your left, and then you'll come to the Chena, then you turn to your left, and come home." Oh, God! I didn't know where I was going. Anyway, when I got to the trestle, I knew that I was OK. I went down the slough there, and I hit the Chena River. There was just one or two sled tracks back then. We didn't

¹⁷³ Noyes Slough flows from the Chena River to College Road. College Cleaners was on College Road. That is where the dog trail crossed the road to fields on the north side.

¹⁷⁴ Ice brakes are heavy hooks that are used to anchor the sled so the racer can work with the team without the dogs pulling away. It is difficult to stop a team that is ready to run.

have a snow-go to break our trail, you just went on the trail that you're supposed to go on. So I went on that trail and I came home. AH! What a relief!

I came in third that year. The next year I went in the women's race again. We had only a one day race for women that first year, and then we changed it to two days, Saturday and Sunday. I got in that race and I came in second. I don't remember what difficulty I had then, but you're always gonna have some kind of difficulty when you go on a road that you don't know.

The third year I was feeling more confident in myself. And by that time the races have moved to Creamer's Field.



Fig. 6.1.1 Picture of Effie Racing, 1952

The racing trail crosses several roads and has checkpoints, where people called timers report by radio or phone back to the Race Marshall to tell the Marshall in which order the racers cross the checkpoint and report the times (minute and hundredths of a

minute) that the musher passes through the checkpoint. The current system of tracking lets officials (judges) know if one team passes another on the trail, and in what order the mushers are running. They also report back about problems that mushers encounter, like teams getting tangled in a pass, or moose on the trail. There are formalized rules in dog racing that mushers must follow. These rules call for sportsmanlike conduct and humane treatment of animals. Racing rules state that a slower team must slow down or stop their own team and let a faster team pass when the approaching team leader gets within 50 feet and the driver calls for “trail” or “pass.” Nowadays it is much easier for the checkpoint timers to communicate with the Race Marshall downtown through use of cell phones, so reporting from checkpoints is much faster. The Championship races are broadcast on KFAR Radio and most mushers carry a radio and listen on earphones so they hear all the updates that the public hears. Back in the early days of racing in the ‘50s there was no system of communicating, but there were people out on the trail ensuring that mushers stayed on the right trails. The volunteers might have even gone out on the trails with their own dog teams to sit at a particular site.

When the trail crosses College Road, it goes into a series of fields and wooded areas in less populated areas of Fairbanks. The trail in 2012 is similar to the trail in 1950. The current annual North American starts downtown on Second Avenue, descends to the Chena River, turns into Noyes Slough and crosses College Road headed toward Creamer’s Field and into the woods. The start of the races in the 50s was on the river by the Cushman Street Bridge.

There is still a checkpoint at the golf course on Farmer’s Loop Road, along with various accessible viewpoints, near or crossing roads. Timesheets are accessible through the Sled Dog Central website, and many people listen to checkpoint times that are broadcast on the radio to track each musher. People gather at vantage points to watch the mushers and their teams, or they gather on the Chena River or along Second Avenue downtown. It is a chance for people to enjoy the Spring Carnival atmosphere.

Another thing that has changed over the years is that the championship races are called the Open North American Championship. Mushers are not separated by sex and

the race is open in the sense that mushers can use as many dogs in their teams as they can handle. A week before the Open North American, the Limited North American Sled Dog Races are held at the Jeff Studdert Race Grounds on Farmer's Loop Road. In the Limited races, mushers run in classes designated by the number of dogs they run, for instance the six-dog class, or eight-dog class. Mushers must use the same dogs in all three days of competition; they can drop dogs that aren't performing well, but they cannot add dogs. Dropped dogs have to be hauled back to the start/finish line in the basket of the sled.

Looking through Effie's collection of newspaper articles, I found a wonderful article from the *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, dated Thursday, March 9, 1972. The first five paragraphs read:

Ladies' mushing race began in '29

Men may have started the first organized dog mushing in the Fairbanks area, but women were not far behind. ¶ Two years after the 58 mile Signal Corps race was established in 1927, the ladies of Fairbanks began their own recreation. The Fromm Trophy Race was established in 1929 and the course ran 17 ¼ miles through the hills in Fairbanks. It was an annual affair but offered no prizes, and was abandoned in 1935. ¶ For almost 15 years women raced, but did not fare well in competition with their male counterparts. In 1952 the first Women's North American Championship was established with a purse of several hundred dollars. The official race provided incentive for the local women to raise, train and race their own teams. ¶ The first North American champion was Effie Kokrine, a descendant of a blue-blood dog racing family. Her husband Andy was the winner of the first Men's North

American in 1946. Father John Folger was one of the men who helped carry serum to Nome on that famous journey during a diphtheria epidemic.¶ Brother-in-law Bergman Kokrine was the winner of the Livengood Sweepstakes in 1940, a 165 mile race from Fairbanks to Livengood and back. Like Andy, Effie won the race several times including 1952, 1953 and 1954 events.¹⁷⁵



Fig. 6.1.2 Photo that Appeared in the Newspaper with Article

Effie has a collection of newspaper articles that were written at the time, as well as later recollections about the early days of dog racing. Dog racing was part of the fabric of who she was. The family had a tradition of highly competitive mushers, including Uncle Jimmy Huntington of Huslia.

¹⁷⁵ *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, Special North American Sled Dog Race page compiled by Karen Purdue and Jim Warfield with assistance and photographs from Bob and Libby Wescott and Jess Studdard [sic]. Appreciation was noted to the Alaska Dog Mushers Association for its cooperation. March 9, 1972, page 11.

Jimmy Huntington was a favorite uncle to Effie, and was a great dog racer who traveled to Fairbanks and Anchorage to compete. He was the original “Huslia Hustler,” before George Attla. Jimmy Huntington won the North American Championship Sled Dog Race in 1956. It would have been 1951 or 1952 that she got the dog she mentioned from Jimmy Huntington.¹⁷⁶ In a 1997 interview with Dena Spears¹⁷⁷ Effie identified the dog as Viga. A picture of Effie and Viga was featured in several newspaper articles, including one in the *New River Times* in March of 1980.¹⁷⁸ The first part of this story was not on the tape that was available to me, so it begins in midstream.

Jimmy was getting ready to leave Fairbanks on a commuter bush plane with his dogs, and one dog escaped. Effie shared this story of how she acquired Viga.

So, when this dog got away, Jimmy Huntington told my husband, “If you catch that dog, you can keep it.” The plane took off, and I guess this dog knew that he was left behind, so she let Andrew catch her. She became our dog, and I worked her enough that she was a leader, she was acting as a leader. Most good dogs, when you put them in the lead, they will go ahead. But it takes a really special dog to really go fast and obey commands and everything. When you follow these dog trails around Fairbanks, you just have one way so it was easy to follow. Anyway, the second year I used her I came in second, and by that time they were having two days of races.¹⁷⁹ And then they switched to three days: Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. And so I won that race – that was my second year of winning.

¹⁷⁶ There was no mention of Jimmy Huntington coming into Fairbanks in his Book, “On the Edge of Nowhere.” If he did not race that year, he most likely came into Fairbanks to get supplies and perhaps he had just purchased the dog and she ran away from him while he was loading the plane for the return flight to Huslia.

¹⁷⁷ Oral History 97-244, Effie Kokrine interviewed by Dena Spears in Fairbanks, Alaska on 11-22-97.

¹⁷⁸ I suspect it may have originated in the *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*.

¹⁷⁹ Effie is referring to the Women’s North American Championship Sled Dog Races held in Fairbanks each year during the second week in March.



Fig. 6.1.3 1953 Picture from the *News Miner*, Effie with Viga, Her Leader in her Second Women's North American Title

Then the third race, the next year, Andrew told me to use *his* leader,¹⁸⁰ one that didn't like to obey me, that didn't give me nothing! He'd run along, but that's about it, he'd just run along.

I was not doing too good that first day, because when we came to the College Golf Course, that dog spotted the truck that had hauled him to the race track and he would just not go. I had to work hard to coax him, finally he started running again.¹⁸¹ Coming back through the Golf Course, we went past where the truck had been parked, and it wasn't there, so he just went on home very good after that. And so, up until the turn around I was having trouble with him, so I was in the fourth over-all, fourth position.

And so the last day of the race, I was having the same problem. Whitey was just going along, but not breaking his

¹⁸⁰ This dog's name was Whitey. Andrew had bought a couple of dogs from a man in Steven's Village, who sent the dogs to Fairbanks on a plane. Andrew didn't know which white dog was the leader, so he picked the bigger dog and put him in the lead. Effie recalled that the dog looked a little confused, but he did fine. It wasn't until later that they found out that he wasn't the intended leader, but he remained the leader until Andrew got rid of his dog team.

¹⁸¹ In the interview with Dena Spears, Effie said that Rex Harwood loaned his truck to haul the dogs to the track. The Harwood family lived in Slaterville, the next subdivision closer to downtown from Graehl.

neck. We crossed the Country Club road, and got into the woods, and I was going along, and pretty soon I saw a dog team right ahead of me. They were tangled, and I thought, "Oh, my God, what am I gonna do?" So, I just let the dogs go. I was prepared to stop, I had my foot ready to put on the brake. We just had one trail, one snow-machine trail, and so Whitey ran in the deep snow around it, and just went past them. And then right ahead was another dog team, they were tangled, and so I caught up to them, and I was just encouraging the dogs, "Come on, let's go, let's go, hike, let's go, let's go." And so he done the same thing, and then right ahead, there was another team. Well, there goes the three dog teams that were ahead of me, number one, two, three. And so I passed them and then he got his spirit, and he was proud that he passed three teams just like that, and he came home, and he was real happy that he accomplished something. And I was proud of him, because I didn't trust him, and right in a good pinch, where I needed him the most, he took me right through, and I came in first that year. So I won the North American three years in a row.¹⁸²

¹⁸² Andrew purchased two dogs sight unseen from a man in Stevens Village, who sent the dogs to Fairbanks in a plane. Andrew didn't know which dog was the leader, so he picked the bigger dog and put him in the lead. Effie recalled that the dog looked a little confused, but he did just fine. It wasn't until later that they found out he was not the intended leader, but he remained the leader until Andrew sold his team.



Fig. 6.1.4 Effie and Whitey

A dog team was always important in our life! In Tanana, before we moved up here, was the first race I ever got in. I just had my second baby a month before that, and I told my husband, I said "I wanna get in the race." He told me "No, not with my dogs." So, he went out to the bank.¹⁸³ There was this one young guy who came to the house, and I said "I wanna get in the race so bad, and I don't have dogs. Can I use your father's three dogs?" He had great big dogs that were working dogs, but he said, "Sure!" And so we went up to his house, and we hooked up these three dogs, and he said "Aw, take this little pup, too." They had a little female there. He said, "Take her, too, you know, it's just for the fun of it." We hooked them up, and went down the bank, and that's when my husband found out that I was racing. He couldn't say nothing then, and so I came in second that time, because when those dogs started the race, see Old Charlie lived down the river, and going down, they thought they were going home. Then when

¹⁸³ In Tanana the races are run on the frozen river. Observers would either watch from the river bank, or gather on the river ice. Since the bank is significantly higher than the river, it is a good vantage point.

we turned around, I had a lot of trouble with them turning around, to head back to town. Then, when I was having trouble, because they didn't want to go back to town, this one dog team passed me. So coming back, I caught up with her and I had to hold the brake all the way, but I didn't care, I was in the race. I came in second that year. I was hooked on dog racing.

So when I came to Fairbanks, and after running for five years, I was really hooked. So, even after we got rid of our dogs and I didn't even have dogs, I used to borrow dogs and get in with anything, as long as I had the entry fee. I was working by that time, so it didn't matter, you know, I made my entry fee, and I was racing.

After we got rid of our dogs, it took me a while to build up our dog team again, because I had children. I started out with one pup, and then we kept on, and my kids was growing up. I had one son named Raymond, and he was a natural dog man. So, when he was young, he was in the three-dog class, four-dog class, and as he was growing, well, my kennel was growing. He was a champ, too, in his junior year. So then I had my own team.

One day after school, my two sons were going to drive dogs, so I helped them hook up, you know, running back and forth, hooking up the dogs and getting them started. I came in and sat in a chair and then I just took a deep gasp, and I lost my breath. I lost consciousness, and I just sat there, gripping the table. Here, I had a slight coronary attack.¹⁸⁴ From there I lost the use of my right arm for a long time. I couldn't use my right arm. I

¹⁸⁴ This was probably in 1964 or 1965.

finally went to the doctor, and he said "Well, you had a slight coronary attack." He said, "Take it easy, and don't go driving dogs," 'cause everybody knew I was driving dogs. The name Effie Kokrine, you just automatically thought of dog mushing. He said, "Don't you drive dogs or anything." I never said nothing.

I was driving for Chuck Aubert at that time, so I went in the race, and I was fine. But the third day, it snowed real bad, and you couldn't see the trail. So the Dog Musher's had a snow machine go around the race track.¹⁸⁵ Coming back in from the field, coming into the starting chute, the snow machine went off the track, and I wasn't prepared for that. I don't know what number I was, but because of the road condition, the people ahead of me weren't doing too good, and I caught up with them. I passed the last team, and I was coming in first. I was coming in first, ahead of the pack. I wasn't watching the road good, 'cause I was relaxed - I was home! I hit that place where the snow machine went off the road, and I tipped over, and when I tipped over I couldn't get back up, because my one arm was useless. I put the sled up-right, but the dogs were going home, 'cause the starting chute was right in front of them. I hung on as long as I could, dragging, and I finally had to let go. I didn't let go - the sled just slipped out of my hand, and I had to walk in. Here was Effie Kokrine, the great musher, walking in. That put a very fancy finish to my career as a dog musher. And then, from there on, I could not race any more. That was the rules of the game. I was black-balled.

¹⁸⁵ The snow machine would have compacted the new snow and marked the trail for the mushers.

During the time I was racing, racing covered a lot of area. Being a good sportsman is an important part of racing. You have to be courteous to the musher behind you, or ahead of you. If somebody catches up to you, you're supposed to pull off, and let them get ahead because they already gained that time on you. Let them get ahead.

One time when I was driving with Chuck Aubert's dogs, and he had big dogs, so I was only using six - and that's before they had a snow break. We were in the race, and this woman behind me had twelve dogs. She was Lena Gallahorn. Her husband came up to race, so I don't think that she was familiar with the dog team. She didn't know how to act in an emergency. So when she caught up to me I naturally pulled to the side, but she didn't encourage her dogs to go right by me. They bunched up passing my dogs, and they got tangled. And when she passed me, I hear a dog start hollering in pain. Before my dogs got excited, I pulled the sled off to the side, and I tied my snubbing line¹⁸⁶ to a tree, and I went up there, ran amongst her dogs, while she just stood there in the sled. I don't know what she was waiting for. And so I ran up there amongst her dogs, and I saw what was the matter - the toe line¹⁸⁷ was wrapped around one dog's foot. I undone her back line, and straightened out the team, and they started going again. Then I went back to my sled, and they were jerking to go. Six big dogs, and I didn't have the strength to pull

¹⁸⁶ The snubbing line is a rope that you tie the sled to a stationary anchor, like a tree or post, when you are hooking up the dogs. The dogs are usually anxious to run and they jump and pull to get going.

¹⁸⁷ The tow line is the main line that runs from the sled to the leader(s). All other dogs are connected to the tow line by hooks on the end of the harnesses and by a short neck line that connects the dog's collar. More about racing can be found at the Alaskan Sled Dog & Racing Association site: <http://www.asdra.org/>.

them back. I pulled them back, tried to untangle myself from the tree, but the tree was just out of my reach. Finally, I got my sled untied, and I kept a'going, and I had a fast ride from there on! So, there's a lot more to it than just racing dogs. And, that's what makes it so good - you get out in the open, and you're going along, and it's just beautiful.

That's why it's good now, that they have Junior races. They continue on, and I think those kids are...I know that they're enjoying it. They're also learning how to be considerate to each other, 'cause when you're out on the trail, you just don't know what to expect - you might run into a moose, you might have trouble passing each other, or something, but those kids are doing real good. Like when somebody fall off, there's always somebody that'll pick 'em up, regardless of what position he's in, he'll haul his buddy in. The Junior Dog Musher's are doing *really* good, because it's teaching them responsibilities and everything.¹⁸⁸

After I quit racing in the Open North American, I could still get in the passenger race, if I had an adult with me, so I kept getting in passenger races. Then we had the Kokrine Memorial Races. That started twenty years ago, after Henry Kokrine died. The Lion's Club, North Pole, thought that they should have a fundraiser for Henry Kokrine¹⁸⁹. So right after the North American, we had a fun race. Everybody paid an entry fee, but the money didn't

¹⁸⁸ Every year the Juniors also awarded a Sportsmanship Award to a musher who displays these qualities.

¹⁸⁹ Henry was married to Flora, who later married Billy Demoski. At the time of Henry's death Flora was left with seven children.

all go to the winners, it went to donation. We had the Kokrine Memorial Race for almost twenty years, but this year we quit, because there's too much activities all over.

I could still get in that race. In the Kokrine Memorial Race, there were no rules, like in the North American, so I can get in there by myself, with one dog, two dogs, three dogs, but I usually use three dogs.

I would get in the Poker Race, and three winters ago was the last time I got in there. It was just so neat! Here, I had this little stroke, and I had all kinds of problems. I had a little heart attack a couple years ago, and I still get out there and enjoy doing what I like to do. And, it's just recently that I am without dogs in my yard. I always had dogs in my yard, and I think they are very nice to have in the yard. When you come home, they're lookin' at you, waggin' their tails. The worse of all, if you have food scraps, you can't go out and give it to them. To have dogs is just like having kids - I don't know how to explain it, but they're...they are so neat to have.

6.2 Junior Dogmusher's Association

Then there's the Junior Dog Races, too. They started the Junior Dog Races in the '50s, and I got involved in count of my children. I stayed involved most of the years.

About thirty years ago, my little grand-daughter was in the race, and she was the youngest musher.¹⁹⁰ Jerry, her father, said "Gee, we should have a prize for the youngest

¹⁹⁰ Granddaughter Effie Lynn Pearson was the first recipient of the Youngest Musher Award. Her father, Jerry Pearson was an official, and mother Mary Pearson was the race timer. They worked with the Junior's for many years.

musher." I said, "Yeah." And he said, "Well, you make something, and we'll give it to her as the prize."

That was thirty years ago, and all those thirty years I keep giving the youngest musher of the race an award. No matter how old, sometimes at two-years-old, three-years-old, four-years-old. I started making little jackets, little kuspuks, hats, mitts, or whatever. One year I was real busy, so I just knit a pair of socks for the youngest musher. They always looked forward to something. Now, every year, they say, "Well, who's the youngest musher? What's he gonna get?" And it's getting so that they look forward to it. Every year I get the phone call "Well, Effie, are you gonna donate again?" I said "Yes!"

Before that, Jeff Studderd used to be the one to give out the prizes and everything, but after he died, I don't know - I was there, so they got me to give the Red Lantern.¹⁹¹ I gave away the Red Lanterns for every Junior Dogmusher's banquet, except this year I just didn't think I could stand up that long to pass them out.¹⁹² Besides, it's time that I quit doing something...so I did not give away the Red Lantern this year, but I still gave away the Youngest Musher's Award. It's surprising how many people would tell me, "Well, you know when my daughter, or my son, was small he got the Youngest Musher's Award." So it's very important to the little kids, because they don't come away empty handed.

¹⁹¹ The Red Lantern award was given to the last musher in every class. The origin of the Red Lantern Award was a joke. It was given so the last musher could find their way home in the dark.

¹⁹² Roxie Wright took over the honor of passing out the Red Lantern Award. Roxie started in the Junior's and went on to become a multi-year champion musher, and first woman winner, in the Open North American, and the Fur Rendezvous World Championship in Anchorage, and won the European Alpirod race.

This year they were really concerned about me, they said, "You wanna go to the dog race?" "Oh, no, I have to work," because I work in the school sometimes, whenever they call me. "I gotta work this morning."

The next day, I had to do something, I don't remember. On Sunday, they came and they got me, and they took me out to the race track, and they just treated me so good, and I just thought they were just being really nice. That night, they said "Have you got a ride to the banquet?" Well, my daughter that usually goes with me, well she wasn't going with me this year¹⁹³, so I said "No." "OK, we'll pick you up. We'll pick you up when it's time to go to the banquet." "OK!"

When it was time for them to pick me up, I was standing at the door waiting. I saw a car go by, then I see a white car coming. It was slowing down, and I thought, it wouldn't be the Dog Musher's coming to get me 'cause they all know where I live. It slowed down, and here was a white limousine! It stopped, and I said "Did you come to pick me up?" I didn't even think of a limousine. I just thought of somebody picking me up in the group.

I said, "Did you come to pick me up?" They said, "Yeah." And here it was, this white limousine. The man opened the door for me, I got in and there was these girls, the officers of the Junior Dogmusher's in there, greeting me. Oh, my gosh! I was riding in a white limousine. They

¹⁹³ I usually accompanied Effie to the banquet every year. I was also a volunteer with the Juniors, helping as announcer at the North American. I also had my two sons racing for several years, as well as nieces and nephews. Mary Pearson was the Timekeeper and Historian for the Juniors for years.

gave me a scenic ride for half an hour, then took me over to where we're having the Junior banquet.



Fig. 6.2.1 Effie Exiting the Limousine

When we got there, people were taking pictures, and the door opened. There were two boys opening the doors. Then I went in, and everybody in there stood up and said "Cheers!"

"Golly! What's going on?" Here, they were celebrating my thirtieth year of giving the Youngest Musher's Award. So that was a very pleasant surprise. For the youngest award I made a pair of mittens, with the strings attached so they don't lose it. It was really cute, so, it was a very good finish to the Junior Dogmusher's. And at least I had been with them all their career. I had seen Roxy Brooks when she was a teen-ager, and I seen her son, Ramy Brooks. He was one of the youngest mushers.¹⁹⁴ There's just a big history behind the Junior Dog Musher's...very exciting.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ Ramy went on to become a participant of the Iditarod 13 times, coming in second place twice. He ran the Yukon Quest, another well-known long distance race, twice. He won the Quest in 1999.

¹⁹⁵ Talking about the Junior Dog Musher's reminded Effie of living in Tanana years ago. She told a story which I did not place in this chapter. It is documented in Appendix III.



Fig. 6.2.2 Effie with Junior Dog Musher's

Chapter 7 Elder in Training

7.1 Move to 7.5 Mile Richardson Highway, Then Back to Graehl

Andrew bought the place out on the Richardson Highway during the summer that I spent in Tanana with relatives, staying in the house of Mary and Phillip Kennedy. It was the only time that I ever spent significant time in Tanana. I got to know a lot of cousins and met most of the other people in town. I don't remember a lot about the adults that I met, but have memories of playing and events, like the Fourth of July celebration. My friend, Freda Swenson, and I won the three-legged race for our age category. I don't remember riding in a boat, but I remember swimming in the Yukon River during the hot summer days. I was nine years old.

My mother wrote to me in Tanana and told me that Dad bought a house out the highway. It had four bedrooms and two bathrooms with showers. It was on a large lot surrounded by woods. I could not believe it. What a change that would be from our little house in Graehl. I wanted to return to Fairbanks right away, but I did not actually return until the family had already relocated. I had to share a room with my younger sister, but I did not care. We had our own room, and that was exciting to us.

We had a lot of fun living out there, playing in the woods, running dogs on the trails and walking to our older sisters' houses. Ellie and her family had a house at six-and-a-half mile, and Mary and her family had a house at eight mile. There were blueberries in the woods that we picked at the end of summer.

By the time we had been out there several years it was not that much fun any longer. Mary and Jerry, who lived through the woods a half mile away, lost their home to fire and ended up moving away. Transportation back and forth to town was always an issue. It was difficult to attend functions and after-school activities. We started to feel isolated. Plus, the house did not hold up well. Problems with the furnace and later with the septic system created stress.

We lived in Graehl from 1949 until 1961, then we moved out the Richardson Highway, into a Quonset hut. We stayed

out there seven and a half years. I had to hitch-hike to work all the time. There was a bus service when we first moved out there, and then the bus service quit, and I had to hitch-hike every day to go to work. I was working six days a week, and sometimes my husband was there for me, but most of the time he wasn't. I was getting really depressed.

There was a woman¹⁹⁶ who kept bugging me, saying "Could you rent my house? Stay in my house." She knew how dissatisfied I was, staying way out there.

She kept asking me, "Why don't you buy my house?" "Why don't you rent my house?" It was a house in Graehl, that was very...I liked it. I liked the location, and I thought it was pretty cute.

I was scared of doing anything on my own. I was used to Andrew always telling me what to do. Finally, I just couldn't take it anymore, so, in December I said "OK! Lemme go over there and look at that house you're talkin' about."

So we went over and looked at this house, and then I talked to my boss' husband.¹⁹⁷ He said that he would connect the furnace, and he would connect the water for me. He said, "If you need help of any kind, anytime you get in a difficulty with the payment, or something," he said "I'll help you."

I was working steady, and they knew that I would keep on working, and that I took my responsibilities very

¹⁹⁶ Vera Strack, mother of Roxy Wright, who was formerly married to Gareth Wright.

¹⁹⁷ Effie was working for Hiroko's Tailor Shop on Second Avenue. She and Hiroko had become good friends, and Hiroko was very supportive of Effie purchasing the house on Front Street in Graehl, where she lived for the rest of her life. Hiroko's husband was Phillip Reed.

serious. They even went to Seattle for three years, and I was in charge of the tailor shop, so they knew they could trust me.

I looked at the house, and I said, "Oh, yeah, I'll take it." I was just so disappointed with my life, and the house we had then. It was cold out, in December.

When we had the furnace going for three days in the house in Graehl, I said "OK, I'm gonna move."

I got somebody to move the dogs, because my children had dogs. I got somebody to move me, my stuff, and get what groceries we needed. We moved in here that day.

The house was sort of small, but it was still comfortable. I moved in here, and then, my husband found out what was going on, and he said "Well, how about me? What am I gonna do?" I told him that was up to him, he can do what he wants. I had just had it.

Andrew didn't say a thing, he just hung around, and hung around, and boy, he was right there to go to bed that night (laughs).

I got very good terms on the house - this woman was renting it to me for \$125.00 a month, just enough to make her payment to the bank. It was right after the big flood,¹⁹⁸ when she didn't want the responsibility of this house, because they were living someplace else. She just wanted it off her hands. She gave me a good term, but I was *scared* to buy it, so I was willing to just pay the rent. I was scared to tell her that I *would* buy the house. Then after we stayed here a year, I thought, "Well, gee, it

¹⁹⁸ The big flood in Fairbanks was in 1967. This house has a basement that was under water during the flood, and there would have been flood water in the upstairs as well.

didn't take long for that thousand dollars to build up." So, she asked me again to buy it. She said, "The rent that you put into the house already, we can call that part of the down payment."

So I said, "OK! I might as well." I didn't think that I would ever move anyplace else, and at least I knew I was under my own roof. So she gave me a good term on the down payment, and the monthly payment was the same as the rent had been: \$125; except, I had to give her an extra \$2,000.

At this house, there was a little log cabin next door, which is on a little lot. The lots were connected so I got both the lots. My house here didn't have a big yard, but when you put the two together, that gave me enough yard to keep our dogs and do something with the yard.

The cabin had been condemned after the big flood. During the summer the kids were staying over there, just camping out. They started staying in there so I thought, "I might as well have electricity in there." I had the house wired up and electric lights put in there. It was OK for a while.

Then pretty soon, more and more people started to stay in the cabin. By that time the City was putting in the sewer line and the water line, and they asked me, "Do you want to connect that cabin?"

I really should have said no, but I said, "Oh, go ahead," not thinking about the water in wintertime. If no one was in there, would it freeze up? So I said, "Go ahead." Dummy! It cost a lot more than I expected. After the City water and sewer lines were put in, there was somebody in there all the time. My daughter stayed there,

somebody's there all the time.¹⁹⁹ Then, finally, my grandson that was always my sidekick since he was born started to stay there, and he's still staying there. He has always been Grandma's boy.²⁰⁰

You know, when I was having children, my oldest daughter got married, and when she had babies, her husband didn't want me to touch the kids.²⁰¹ Mary and Jerry knew about that, how Ben didn't let me touch the kids or love the kids or anything. Then Jerry, Jr., was born to Mary and Jerry (Mary was my second daughter, Robert was between Eleanor and Mary). When they came back from the hospital, they came into my house, and Jerry walked right over to me, and he laid the baby in my arms, and he said "Now, here's your grandson." And he was my grandson ever since. He was attached to me, and all while he was growing up, he spent a lot of hours riding on my back, and I did things with him. We'd go camping, and he'd be on my back in the packsack. When we returned to the Yukon River, he went with us. He was around me all the time, and he's still staying next door. In the wintertime he shovels the snow for me and takes care of the little things. In summertime he cuts the grass in my yard. He's staying in the house rent-free, but he pays for his own fuel and electricity.

Then I got the smokehouse. I had the smokehouse put into my back yard. There was yard sale across the road, and they had a little shack, about 6' x 8', with a screen

¹⁹⁹ Kenny stayed in the cabin for several years, then I lived there for several years after that.

²⁰⁰ Jerry Pearson, Jr. is still living in the cabin in 2013.

²⁰¹ Effie's oldest daughter was Eleanor; her first husband and the father of her children was Ben Moseley.

all around it - and that was just right for my smokehouse, so I said, "Gee, I'd like to have that."

When I first asked the man, he said \$5.00, but I had no way to move it, so I never paid him. By the time I finally got around to moving it, he had moved away and left the shack there, and I still haven't paid him.

I told my son that I wanted it moved over here, and he moved it. So, if I ever see that man again, I owe him \$5.00! I've been using my smokehouse ever since. I go over to the Yukon River, because we got new fish net.

I go over to the river and put in a fish net for a couple of days, because the law permits you to fish only two days, and you have to pull up your nets. Well, that's just fine, because we go over there, put in our net, and take a cooler. We can fish, then cut it or put it in the freezer, whatever I want. And it works just great!

And of course, I had several incidents. We smoked the fish; we put a little fire in the smokehouse. Steve Lozonsky²⁰² got me a tank, one of those fifty gallon tanks.²⁰³ He cut it in half and made a place for me to build my fire. He got me a piece of tin that covered the whole thing. And of course, you know how people²⁰⁴ are, they saw smoke coming out of a shed in back of my yard, and they called the Fire Department instead of checking to see what it was. They just saw smoke. So, the Fire Department came over here, sirens screaming and everything, ambulance and everything came. I was washing clothes with a washboard in

²⁰² Steve is the husband of Rosie Lozonsky, who raced with Effie in the 50's.

²⁰³ Like an oil barrel.

²⁰⁴ Effie's neighbors, whom she didn't know. They were renters, not the long time residents of Graehl.

my bathroom, because I didn't have a place to wash clothes here. I was washing clothes, scrubbing my pants on my washboard, and I didn't hear all this going on.

My grandson from next door came in. He told me there was a fireman over here. He said he went over and looked at the smoke house, and he checked the fire, and he walked away without saying a word. He just got in the fire truck and took off, and the ambulance went with him.

People come over and wanted to know what's the matter. Here, I was just minding my own business in my bathroom. It was funny!

I had a lot of incidents like that happening. It's just...I don't know what people think. But, I'm glad they responded to a call, even it was a foolish call, not saving my life or anything. But, if people are concerned, why don't they check to see what the smoke is about?

Next door, on Second Street, there's a big building, and Mr. Brown²⁰⁵ is up there. He said that the first year he had a complaint, too, about smoke, but he just told the people, "That's Effie's smokehouse" (laughs). So I thought that was pretty cute.



Fig. 7.1.1 Effie and Annette, Cutting Salmon Strips in Effie's Backyard

²⁰⁵ Fred Brown is an attorney who has his office in that building. He attends St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, which is the church that Effie attended the whole time she lived in Fairbanks.

I had a lot of trouble with people that don't understand, you know, these strangers that come to town, and they just don't understand. My yard is a lived-in yard, that's my private yard. I figure I could do whatever I want. But it seems like all the neighbors got something to say about me, being a Native woman, so they can feel good, I guess.

One time we had dogs out here, and my son went out and let one of the young pups loose. Not a young pup, but she was old enough to be on a chain. He had the pup loose, and he took her for a walk up the road just to give her exercise. Pretty soon here comes a dog-catcher, the animal control truck. I said, "What's the matter?"

He said, "We have a complaint that your dogs are just raising heck and they're starving and they're barking."

I said, "No, they're not!" I said, "My son just took the puppy for a walk, and the dogs were barking because they were jealous. They want to go."

He looked at me, and he said, "What's your name?"

I gave him my name, and he looked at me sort of funny, and he said, "Well, if I knew it was you..." And that's all he said. But I could tell what he was thinking...I'm a dog lover, how could anybody say my dogs were starving, abused and everything like that?

So, it's not only us that has a lot to learn, a lot of new people around here have to learn about things, too. I don't bother my neighbors, and I don't know why neighbors have to bother me. I am very happy where I am - I'm very satisfied with the rest of my neighbors as long as they leave me alone, because I leave them alone.

So now I have my yard, and I can do whatever I want. I cut fish in the backyard, and it is so beautiful. I've got the tarps; I went to a garage sale, and somebody gave me those big tubs,²⁰⁶ the ones you could take a bath in, those oval ones, four feet long, just right to wash my fish with.

She might have given me the tub, but she charged me for the roast pot. Someone else loaned me a silver salmon fish net because he had no place to store it. So, if I store it for him, I might go ahead and use it. Well, I still have it, and I'll bet you that's going on ten years. So, whenever he needs it, I have it to give it back to him.

I forgot to mention that I have allergies. Well, I kept getting allergies, and I didn't know what was wrong. It seems to get worst when I go outdoors. In the wintertime I get over it.

I didn't know too much about allergies. I found out that I'm allergic to spruce trees. When I smell the spruce trees in the summertime, I lose my voice. If I try to plant a garden or flowers, my hands just break out all over. And if I'm around fresh grass that's being cut, I break out on my face. So now I try to avoid being in contact with any trees.

²⁰⁶ Lisa Behr gave Effie that tub, which was perfect for thawing out King salmon from the freezer to cut into strips. Effie had a butcher block cutting table and an old swing set for hanging the strips while processing.

Chapter 8 Return to the Yukon River Fish Camp

8.1 Andrew, and Return to the Yukon River Camp

I'll just go ahead to about 1973. My husband started talking about getting a boat and getting ready to leave for the summer. He had just retired, and now he could go, because when he was working for wages, he had to stay in town all the time, all summer long.²⁰⁷

When he retired he said, "Well, it's time to go back on the river." I was still working. He built²⁰⁸ a boat, and then he bought a second-hand motor that was advertised in the newspaper, and he got everything ready.

I bought a garage-sale fish net and got that ready. So the next spring, in 1974, we were ready. I quit my job as a seamstress over town, and we had somebody take us over to the haul road, because the haul road bridge was open then,²⁰⁹ and you could ride up the highway and get in the boat and go down river from there.

We just took what we needed to get started. We took our fishnet and wash tubs, and we had a couple of dogs. We went over, and I remember Dee Dee²¹⁰ hauled us over. I don't know who hauled the boat.

We launched our boat in the river, and aw, that was really something, because we hadn't lived on the river

²⁰⁷ Andrew worked out of the Carpenter's Union, and most construction work was done in the summer.

²⁰⁸ Effie said that Andrew bought a boat, but his children remember him building the boat in the yard and how much pleasure he got out of building it out of wood, then applying fiberglass for water-proofing.

²⁰⁹ The haul road is the Dalton Highway, which leads to Prudhoe Bay. It was built to accommodate the big trucks that brought supplies to the camps that were set up along the road during construction of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline. The Yukon River Bridge had yet to be built, which supports travel to the north side of the River, and the pipeline, which is attached to the Bridge.

²¹⁰ Dee is Deanna Linzner, who did go up to the Bridge one year but it was later. It was probably Jerry Pearson who took them up that first year. He made many runs up to the bridge, hauling gas and supplies and dropping off and picking up Andy and Effie.

since 1949. Well, the last time I stayed on the river was 1949, but Andrew hadn't been on the river since 1948.

So we got ready, put the boat in the water, and loaded up everything, and pushed out, and we were on our way to our fish camp. Andrew had a camp fifty miles above Tanana, at a place called Fish Creek.²¹¹

We traveled all day, and we got down there sort of at night. Andrew said, "Well, we'll land here," because the beach was good, and it was a little above where we had our camp the last time we were there.

We landed on a gravel beach, and right next to the bank there was mud. We just put our tent there temporary, for the night. We erected our tent, and we slept. It was 11:00 by then. That tent stayed there until we left camp that fall. That temporary tent was still there (laughs).



Fig. 8.1.1 Andrew Sitting by the Tent

²¹¹ On the map, it is identified as Stevens Creek, along with Stevens Hill, where the game trail they used is. I don't know to whom that name refers, as it was always called Fish Creek by Andrew and his family.

All we did was level out underneath the bottom of the tent. We built a little smoke house. We had this little fish net that I bought, and we caught enough fish to have a little fish, and it was just, *ah*, it was the freedom to be back - doing *nothing*!

We only took one can of coffee. Andrew said, "Oh, that's all we need...we only need one can of coffee." But he never thought of all the people that were going back and forth between Rampart and Tanana, and that they would all stop. And when people stop, the first thing you do is make coffee. So our coffee didn't last too long. So we said, "Well, we're gonna have to go to town and get coffee."

So we went to Tanana and got coffee. There was a girl there, Andrew's cousin's adopted daughter, and she said, "I wanna go with you, I wanna go to camp."

Oh, golly, it was the first time in our married life we had a chance to be alone, and she wanted to come with us. So, OK! She stayed in a little canvas tent where we kept our stuff. We didn't have any place to put the stuff, so we just put them under a lean-to, and that's where she slept. That girl stayed with us a little while, until her brother, Edwin, came and took her back down, because she was ready to leave camp.

Then we got a message on the radio, "I'm sending your grandson, Jerry Pearson, down...pick him up in Tanana." So we went back to Tanana again and picked up our grandson.

He came to stay with us for just a little while, but he stayed there with us until we were ready to break camp in the fall. And he just loved it, and we got along real good.

In September, on Labor Day, our son, Robert²¹² came down. He had been working in Fairbanks. He had a boat, so he came down to visit us in camp. He just came for a couple of days, but he liked it so well, he never did go back to Fairbanks until the first part of October. He was hooked then. He came the next year, and he came back every year after that, and right now he's still over there, and it's 2000.²¹³ This was in 1974, and he just loves being alone, and he just loves that life. Even the air is different.

After you stay over there in the clean air, mountain air - even your food tastes different. Your taster opens up, and your nostrils...you can just smell the freshness in everything. And it's just, aw, something that you can't describe.

In the meantime, while we were there, we said, "Well, if we come back next year - we should clear a place on the bank so we can build a tent frame and it will be there."

We went up on the bank, and right up on top of where we had our tent there was a good place, and there was a little drainage right there, so we used that as our steps, going up. I started clearing the little trees. There were not many big trees there, just a bunch of little spruce trees, bigger than a cup in diameter. I was clearing the ground. Andrew was not feeling too good, so I was doing all the work.

²¹² Robert also worked out of the Carpenter's Union and spent most of his summers working construction.

²¹³ Robert (Bob) Kokrine died in his camp on the Yukon River alone in 2002, a year after Effie passed away. He most likely died of a stroke or an aneurism. It was not required by law for the family to have an autopsy, so we opted not to. Bob is buried in the Tanana Cemetery next to Andrew.

I took a mattock, and I took an axe, and I cut the roots and pulled the things up. I worked there a little bit every day, and I was getting allergies. Oh, I broke out with allergies so bad, my face was just like a rotten tomato. But I just kept on, I kept on working. I didn't understand about allergies. So that was our first year.

We got the bank all cleared out, so the next year we could put our tent up there.

The next year, we came back again, and we put our tent up there. Robert had bought us a bigger tent, and we put that up for the cook shack. Our little 8 x 10 tent we still used for our bedroom shack, and the big one, we used for our cook shack.

I just had a little stove - no oven - but I never let that stop me. We still used a gasoline can oven, and I could bake bread and stuff.

Then we had a bed shipped in on a steamboat, and a few other things. When we first moved there, we built a smokehouse, and we put Visqueen²¹⁴ over it. The next year we had tin, sheet-iron, shipped over on the steamboat to build our smoke house with, so it was slowly coming together.

And I had an experience, too, when I was up on the bank. One day I was wrestling with a root, just working there, and all of a sudden something touched me on the head, and I heard a noise, like when a spruce hen lands on a tree.

The same instant, I heard a voice say, "What are you doing?" in a laughing voice. I sat there, and answered.

²¹⁴ Visqueen is a brand-name of plastic sheeting

I said, "I'm clearing the brushes." I sat there for a while, and I thought, "Oh, I better quit working now." I knew we were gonna be hearing some kind of news. You don't experience something like that without...you know...I'm a Native woman, and I believe in a lot of superstitions of all kinds. I believe that someone's soul, when they depart, that they go all over and visit where they want to.

I went back down, and Andrew said, "What's the matter?" "Nothing." He said, "I think something's wrong with you."

I must have looked frightened or something, so I told him what happened. And sure enough, we heard news that somebody from Fairbanks died. He was from the Yukon River, and I guess he was just visiting and traveling around, all in the same instant that I felt my hair brush against my face and I heard that "thud" like a spruce hen landing on a tree, and in the same instant the voice said, "What are you doing?" It's just...you can imagine the speed of the spirit when it travels.

Andrew was getting sick by that time, and he was getting worst, so I tried to do as much as I could for him and so did Robert.²¹⁵

The fourth year we stayed over there, we had a big smokehouse and everything, right on the beach. Robert was there to help us, and Andrew was getting weak. That August, we used to take a walk up and down the beach sometimes, walking down the beach from our camp to Fish Creek, right below. That creek was where we put in a fishnet when we first got there, at that mouth.

²¹⁵ Andrew made Effie promise not to tell their other children that he was sick, so we didn't know.



Fig. 8.1.2 Raven Ridge, Across from Fish Camp, Fog Rolling in From Fish Creek on the Left, 2:00 a.m. July 3, 2010

Andrew grew up there, since he was two-years-old...no, six-years-old, he lived at Fish Creek.²¹⁶ He was raised there until he was fourteen. Then he stayed with Hans, across the river. When he was seventeen, he was considered a man. He started to stay with his father and mother again, and that's when he started to carry mail.²¹⁷ He carried mail from Tanana over to Wiseman and back again. He made that trip once a month. You know, in those days men grew up fast. When you were a teenager, after you have your change of voice, you were considered a man and you were treated like one, and you have to have the responsibility of one.

²¹⁶ Andrew was born in 1911. The camp was deeded to his father by a White settler named Jack Ross. The house was built by a man with the last name of Cane or Caine (from a recorded interview with Andrew).

²¹⁷ Andrew carried mail with a dog team over a long, rough trail. In a recording that he made, he said it was the roughest 500 miles you could imagine. Sometimes he would have to break trail for the dogs by snowshoe, walking ten miles ahead, come back for the dogs and walk the ten miles a third time, so he actually had to walk 30 miles to advance 10 miles. William Schneider also talked about Andrew running that trail in his book, *On Time Delivery: the dog team mail carriers* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2012) 52-53.

I want to interrupt Effie's transcription and add additional material here because she was too brief while talking about the four years that she and Andrew got to spend in camp. Those years were the best years of their marriage, and after 38 years of a less than happy union, they really enjoyed each other once they were retired and back on the river. Most of their children and grandchildren visited at different times and had great experiences. Some stayed for long periods of time and some for just short visits, but each has a special story about their stay in camp.

I created a DVD in 2004 in an Oral History class taught by Bill Schneider. The DVD is made up from two interviews with family members (Dee and Jerry, Jr.), a lot of old photos from camp, and a selection of music in the background. The DVD is only 15 minutes long but has an emotional impact, talking about the importance of the years on the Yukon River Camp. It will be lengthened with more interviews at a later date.

One of the stories on that DVD talked about how granddaughter Effie "Lynn" Pearson came up with the name for the camp, which became Gramps City. The family would take boat trips to Tanana and Rampart. Rampart is nick-named Ramp City. Lynn thought it was appropriate for the camp to be called Gramps City, and a sign was made by the Pearsons and given to Grandma and Grandpa Kokrine for Christmas. The sign is still at camp, although it is no longer nailed to the birch trees because the trees have grown and the wind moves them constantly. It has to be nailed back up every time we visit the fish camp.

There are remnants of where Gramps City was located, but the willows have grown into trees and the cleared area has been overgrown with weeds. The bank is steep and there is no longer an easy trail to walk up to the wooded area where the tents and cache were located.



Fig. 8.1.3 Picture of Gramps City Sign

At this point I will return to the transcript of Effie talking about Andrew and camp on the Yukon River.

So, Andrew was getting sick, and he had to go to Anchorage for surgery. We went to camp anyway, but we had to be back in Fairbanks in August. Before we went back, Andrew and I were alone in camp, so we said, "Well, let's take a walk down to the creek," because it was a *nice* evening. We walked down there, and it's about a mile, or maybe not quite. We stood at the bank, and I was sort of worried, but I didn't say nothing. I stood there at the bank, facing the creek, looking out into the water. I looked across the river and could see that big mountain - Raven Mountain - and I prayed to that mountain, I told him, "Give me strength."

I prayed to the water, the powerful Yukon River water, I prayed to it for strength. I stood there, and I repeated our marriage vows and said a prayer. I was just standing

there, and Andrew...I never even looked at him...I don't know where he was, said, "Are you ready?"

So I turned and looked, and he was standing on the edge of the water, too, right before the mouth of the creek. I said, "Yeah," and I think I really did get power, because I believe in the power of the river and the mountains, and everything. And, when it came to it, I was able to go through the death of my husband.

We went back up to Fairbanks. We went from camp up to the bridge, and we drove back to town.

Andrew said he had to go to Anchorage to have surgery. We went down, and he had surgery. They just closed him up again and said his cancer was too far gone. He didn't come out of Intensive Care...he was still in there. I asked them how come, and they said they wanted to watch him some more...and then, that's where he died.

By then my daughters, Deanna and Cindy,²¹⁸ were there. That's before she moved to Mississippi. Cindy was with me, and Deanna, and that's where all it ended, in Anchorage.²¹⁹ There is a lot of power in prayer. That's really what helped me the most.

We brought his body back up from Anchorage, and then from here,²²⁰ the rest of my kids went to Tanana, and we had a beautiful fall-time funeral for him in Tanana. Because that was where he came from, and that's where he wanted to be, so we took him down there. Everybody was so helpful.

²¹⁸ Cindy is the youngest child of Andrew and Effie. She lived in Kosciusko, MS 1978-2012.

²¹⁹ One of my great disappointments in life is that I was not in Anchorage when my dad passed. They had kept it a secret that he was so sick, and they didn't indicate that the situation was so grave. I had just started a new job and was concerned about leaving. I did, however, get to talk to my dad on the phone.

²²⁰ There was a small service in Anchorage, a funeral at St. Matthew's Episcopal Church in Fairbanks, and the final funeral and potlatch in Tanana.

The boys dug a grave, and it was just...it was done just so beautiful...with the help of everybody.²²¹ I'm very thankful all the time for the Tanana people.



Fig. 8.1.4 Effie's Family at Andrew's Burial



Fig. 8.1.5 Effie and Folger Relatives at Andrew's Grave

²²¹ Before the family moved from Tanana to Fairbanks Andrew had cleared a large plot in the woods at the City Cemetery. It was his intention that the family would all be buried there one day. Most of the space has been used by others.

Before I left for Fairbanks, in 1949, they weren't as helpful as they are right now. They just go all out, and people have more money, so they put on a good potlatch. It's a comfortable thing, to be there with the comfort of the people, with the help of all the people...the love of all the people.

And you know, church has always been my thing; everything we do was always centered around church. Long time ago, we came to town on holidays. So, even after I came to Fairbanks, I still go to church, so I was never away from religion.

In all my talking, I haven't said too much about religion. Right now, I'm eighty-one years old, and I still believe in the power of things. Like, just the power of love. You have the power of a car, but who makes the power of that car go? Who provides you? Who gives you brains? Who gives you the ability to get gas for the car? A person could not do that by himself.

There are not too many recorded stories by Effie from those visits, but she did talk about her little granddaughter, Janet's, experience. Janet (Jannie) has a brittle bone disease and is very small and fragile, so this incident was pretty stressful.

Effie told this story about Gramps City:

One day, I was playing on the beach with Jannie, and we floated down for a little ways below our camp. That was a couple of years after my husband died, and my son had a part German Shepherd pup. When it was born Jannie called it Spider; she said it looked like a spider. That name just stuck with him. When Spider was big, he always followed me down to the beach, him and my collie pup named

Janie.²²² Anyway, they followed me down, then I landed the boat and got out to tow Jannie back up to camp. We got Jannie settled in the boat, and I started to walk up. Spider kept grabbing the rope and wanted to pull, too. He wanted to pull with his mouth.

I told him, "Ah, na," you know, just talking to him while walking. We were close to the camp, and I thought, "Well...I'm gonna try it." So, I tied this rope around his neck, and I told him, "Go ahead."

He started to pull, and I was behind him, holding the rope. He started to run, and he started to pick up speed, going faster and faster. He knew he was pulling the boat, and he felt so proud of himself. He started to run, and pretty soon I couldn't run fast enough to keep up with him. I stumbled, and I let the rope go, and he just kept running up the beach with Jannie in the peter-bar, and she was trying to steer it.

Then, she started to holler, "What am I gonna do?" I told her, "Hang on!" She put her paddle in the boat, and she was hanging on!

The rope got stuck on a little log that we had right below the cutting raft there on the beach. Spider went behind it, and the rope got caught on that log, and the canoe came to shore.

Jannie was all shook up, and she was just laughing. She said, "I was scared!" And I said, "Well, you hung on!" She just hung on, and the dog stopped because the boat stopped. But, boy, he sure loved trying to pull that boat.

²²² Effie started raising Shetland Sheepdogs, which she had for years. She purchased several registered AKC dogs, and this dog's name was Cheechako Jane.

He pulled the rope right out of my hand and just kept on running up the beach. And he was only about a year old. And so Jannie sure had a rough, wild ride (laughs). I never tried that again. The next time I do that, I'll make sure that I don't tie the dog up to the boat again.

Effie continued to go to fish camp for several summers after Andrew passed away, but it was not as much pleasure for her. The joy of being there was diminished. Her son, Bob, insisted she stay in his cabin, and she no longer stayed down river at Gramps City. The cabin was cozy, and Bob's camp was nice, but it was different. It was not Effie's. Her visits became shorter, and she spent more time in Fairbanks as she got older and more involved in her community service and teaching.

Chapter 9 The Elder Years, Being Grandma Effie

9.1 Grandma Effie, Teacher

Effie loved working with children more than any of her other roles. Many of her volunteer activities involved working with children, even at the American Legion, Dorman Baker Post #11. She always helped organize the holiday parties for the children and grandchildren of members. She had a lot of fun with the Halloween party. Effie loved to dress in a costume for Halloween. She entered the costume contest at her favorite Bingo Hall every year, winning many prizes. But her favorite was the Christmas party, where she always selected children to do the Nativity scene. She brought in props and costumes and had the children follow the star to Bethlehem and the wooden manger, which held baby Jesus. It was important for her to remind the children about the true meaning of Christmas.

If Effie could take a child along with her on any activity or event, she was happy. She never stopped trying to teach and reach out to children.

Effie taught Athabascan culture in the Alaska Room, which is part of the Alaska Native Education Program of the North Star Borough School District. She taught there for many years and was awarded the Teacher of the Year honor in 2001 by the Association of Interior Native Educators. She was the only non-certified teacher ever to receive that award from the Association of Interior Native Educators (AINE), a humbling honor for her. She received that award at the AINE Annual Meeting shortly before she passed away.

In this recording, she talked about her position in the Alaska Room.

I work in the school. Ever since my husband died, I've been working as a Native Education Subsistence Teacher. I've been doing that for many years. I teach about life, I teach about outdoors, I teach about animals, I teach about transportation, and the children just love my program! I just love to talk to them! And they are so encouraging.

I work only three months a year. In our group, I work with the third graders, I teach Athabascan culture. So I work that period, and I just love it! I teach them everything. We talk about fishing, and one day we talked about camping.

I said, "Long time ago people use tents, and they didn't have pup tents and these store-bought camping tents they have now. We used to just have a whitewall tent.

I told them, "Tomorrow I'm gonna bring spruce boughs and I'll demonstrate how we weave the spruce boughs on the floor so that you could walk on it."

After school that day I went and I looked for some good spruce boughs that fanned out real nice. If you look at the spruce boughs, you can see that some branches fan out really good.

I took a bunch of those, and I put them on an Army blanket, and I took them to school. I was telling these kids how to weave it, weave it together real good, and it just lays flat and you could walk on it. Even a baby just learning how to walk can walk on it real good without the spruce coming up.

While I was talking, I started to get a sore throat, and my eyes started to water. I said, "Oh, spruce! It must be my allergies!" So I put them away.

The next morning I was feeling better, so I thought "I'm gonna try it again, and see if I really am allergic to spruce that bad."

I was telling the children about the camping, and I was demonstrating how to put the spruce boughs down, and again, my eyes started to water and my throat started to

close up. I knew then definitely that I cannot touch spruce boughs.

Golly, all our life, from the time we were small, we lived around spruce boughs. We had it for our floor every summer, and when we went camping, and when we had a picnic or something, we put spruce boughs down and sat on them. And here, in my old age I can't touch spruce! That is terrible. How can you go camping without touching spruce?

So, in all the years since I have lived in Fairbanks and went back to the river, I've had to learn how to know what all I'm allergic to.

Right now, whenever I cut fish, by the time I cut fish for a couple of days, I start breaking out, so I limit everything I do.

Now I think I'm even getting allergic to some foods, but we'll deal with that later as it gets worse. And you know the fumes in Fairbanks? One time I was standing on the street, waiting for my ride, and my throat was closing up, so I've been trying to notice how walking around in town affects me. I can't walk around town with all that exhaust without losing my voice.

Now, I'm in bad shape, so I take good care of my voice. When I use it, like when I work in the schools, I have to limit myself and take care of how much I talk.

Working in the schools is very interesting! You get all kinds of children. I try to give them a hug. Sometimes I give them all a hug, and sometimes I shake their hands, and I tell them that I'm their Grandma, so I can sort of make them feel at ease, make them feel like they belong.

I introduce myself as Grandma Effie, and sometimes I shake all their hands, and say, "Good morning." That gets their interest; they sort of become alert. I think I build some kind of communication with children that is just great. Everywhere I go, every time I work with the children, they seem to love it. Even if I don't have much to say, I say it with love; I say it with the feeling that I care about the children.

Sometimes when I give those kids a hug, they just shy away from me, pull away. Well, I don't coax them. I figure, they must have a problem. But I love doing what I do, and I'm gonna do it probably...at least give it couple more years.

Of course, I'm not promising anything, I might not even be here next year, but, if I'm here, I'll be working at the schools again. All the teachers call me Grandma Effie, and I'm very proud of it. And most of my friends call me Grandma Effie, and right now when I walk someplace, kids that were in my class a long time ago say, "Hi, Grandma!"

In the Dog Musers, they still call me Grandma, because when my first daughter had a baby, somebody said "Oh, here comes the Grandma," and so, I've been Grandma even to the dog musers, from about 1955. The dog musers started to call me Grandma, and now everybody that I know calls me Grandma.

When I went to Mississippi to visit my daughter, I worked in the schools. I talked to the school children and told them that I'm a Grandma.

I went to Tanana, too. Four different times I went down there and talked to the children in the schools. So I have been traveling all over for the school districts.

One time I went to Sitka for some kind of a meeting. They asked me to tell what we do in school and stuff. So when I went down, I took some of the stuff that I use with the children here, what I teach them in school, what we talk about. I took some of my things down.²²³

Then it was my turn to tell about what we do in the school. So I brought out my stuff. First, I brought out my skin bag made from a moose heart, because the moose heart has a bag over it. It's got fat all over it. You remove the fat, and there's just a plastic shell. You wash that real good and put a skin²²⁴ on there for drawstring and then dry it real good. People used to use that for lunch pail, a long time ago.

I remember when I was small, my daddy using that moose heart-skin for his lunch. You can put your dry fish or dry meat or crackers or whatever you want in there. You put it in your packsack, and it's very clean.

Then I had a bladder. I showed the kids the bladder. The kids say, "ooh, ack." You know they just think talking about a bladder is terrible. But I let them know that a bladder is a very beautiful, important part of our life and we cannot live without it. And it's just natural...just like talking about your mouth or lips or anything else. I told them how we save the moose bladder and washed it. And

²²³ Most likely Effie carried her supplies down in her blue suitcase, which was well known in the schools.

²²⁴ A strip of moose skin is sewn around the top of the bag and a drawstring is threaded through the moose skin, which is more pliable than the heart bag would be, since you don't want to damage the bag.

you take it and cut it behind the muscle. Then we would get a stick, the size that you wanted your opening to be after. Then the bladder closes up into just that little funnel. And you take a stick, and you peel the stick, and you blow up the bladder really good, and it's just like a balloon. You could stretch it, and you'll blow it up. If it's a big moose, it will be a big balloon; if it's a little moose, it won't be so big. You blow it up and put the stick in there and dry it. And when you tie the neck, you use a cloth, because if you use a string, it will probably cut into it. I would just rather tie it with a rag. Then you dry it about three or four days, and you have a little bottle. That's what people used to use for a water container. When you're out hiking or something, you need water. Well, you just take that bag of water. Not only that, people used to use it for an oil container.

When you get fish in the fall time, they're very rich. You save all the oil, especially whitefish. In the fall time, you cut the fish guts open, and the organ inside has a lot of fat on it. You render that, and you save that oil.²²⁵ You save it in that bladder bag for the wintertime.

Two hundred years ago, people didn't have stores to go to. So, they had to prepare their stuff early. They had to go get the grease and stuff whenever they can, so that water container bag was very useful.

When I got that bladder bag, it was cut, so I just made the cut a little bigger. I sewed a skin around it and I stuffed the whole bladder with cloth towels, because a

²²⁵ To render fat you have to slowly cook it down to a liquid, then strain the liquid to remove tissues.

paper towel would stick to the bladder, and I made a big bag.

That was also a container to hold food or to hold blueberries. When you pick blueberries and sometimes you get juice all over. Well, if you put them in that waterproof bag, you have your clean berries, and the juice of your blueberries don't go all over.



Fig. 9.1.1 Two Old Bladder Bags Made by Effie

So I have that bag, and I also have a goose feather wing that my mother used to use for a whisk broom. I also have different bones that we used for different things. I have a rabbit snare, and then I have a rabbit skin. A tanned rabbit skin with the head and everything on it. I show them how the rabbit would jump around and how they get caught in the snare. I also have a rabbit foot.

When we were children, we didn't have toys, so everything we had, we just used for toys. So this rabbit foot, we used to play as dogs and stuff.

One time we were camping, and my mother forgot to bring a dishrag, and I remember washing the dishes with a rabbit foot. And it worked the same as a paper towel. And when you want to wipe the table off, you just squeezed the

water out of the rabbit foot, and you can wash off the table, or you can just use it like you're using a rag of any kind. So, it was a toy, and it was also a dishrag.

One time when I was talking about the rabbit foot in school, there was an elderly Eskimo woman sitting there. She was gonna tell her story after I got through talking.

When I got through she said, "You know, I used to use that rabbit foot for a baby wipe." Long ago, people never had washcloths. They didn't have Kleenex or toilet paper, we didn't have tissue. So when we cleaned our babies, we didn't even have a washcloth. We used to just use a rag. And what's the difference between using a rag and a rabbit foot to wipe off a baby? At least, your baby is clean. And that's all you care about, you don't care what you use as long as you wipe the baby's butt off, and then you can rinse off the rabbit foot and dry it, and you use it again.

So, Mother Nature provides for you. I tell them how you would use the rabbit skin for blanket. You sew skins all together.

A long time ago, people didn't have socks and stuff, so they used to wrap their feet up in rabbit skins and then put on their mukluks. And I'd tell them how to make the mukluks, what they are made out of, and everything.

When I'd get started like that, I'd just get carried away. And when we got through, the last day we had a get-together, and I got the award, because I showed more stuff and did more things and had things to show the kids. The other people didn't bring their Show and Tell, they just talked about what they had done. I was showing everything I had and demonstrating. Everybody enjoys that.

I had a piece of moose skin and showed them that it was a tanned moose skin. I went to a meeting in Anchorage and I did the same thing one time. And everybody loved that, even when I was through talking, when we were having our break, everybody wanted to look at the materials. I have rawmane, you know, babiche. And they look at that. I don't know, it just gets people excited to see all the things in the suitcase.

Some people ask how we make things, like a hat or mittens. Well, I made a pattern for them, and they try to copy it. I don't know how many people have come and I have made hats for them or a pattern and helped them do things.

So, even if I'm not getting paid for it, if I'm just at home, I'm still helping people, I'm still useful for something.

I know how to do beadwork, I know how to sew fur, and I can sew anything on a machine, so you can call me a Jack-of-all-Trades.

As long as I can remember, I was always learning to do whatever I could, from tanning rabbit skins to tanning moose skins, tanning a marten skin. I had to learn it all by myself. My mother was bedridden, so she couldn't help me. Then later on, I just developed a stubborn nature, that if it could be done, I could do it. I taught myself to do everything.

The only thing that I will not do is drive a car. It doesn't matter to me; I'd have so much power that I'd probably do more damage in the long run. So I just leave the driving of the car and stuff to others, but that don't keep me home.

9.2 Effie, the Traveler

Effie loved to travel any way she could: by car, boat or plane. Her children used to say that she would get in a vehicle with anyone who was going on a road trip. In handwritten notes she told a story about her friend, Lucy Carlo, inviting her to go to a Native education conference with her. Andrew was still alive so it was in the 70s. I think that was her first time flying out of Alaska. She was thrilled to meet American Indians from different tribes. She made many trips out of Alaska after that. She loved to see new sights. She was disappointed she was not able to get a photo of the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco because her friend could not maneuver well in the traffic, but she had thousands of photos of other experiences. Effie always carried a camera on her trips.

I have traveled just about as many places as I can go. I have gone to the Philippines, and I have gone as far as Philadelphia, and I have traveled so much...little old me, that started out pinching pennies. Now I just save money whenever I can and do things. I've gone up north as far as Huslia, I've gone to Eagle, and I've gone to Kodiak. I joined the American Legion because I think the American Legion is a worthwhile cause. Being a member of the American Legion has given me the opportunity to go to different places for the conventions. I've gone to Kodiak, Sitka, and Haines. I also belong to and worked for Denakkanaaga for a while, and it gave me the chance to go down the river as far as Holy Cross, to go to Fort Yukon, and so I have covered a lot of country! And I've done a lot of things. I worked in the Spirit Camp for kids in the summertime,²²⁶ and I'm just going all the time.

²²⁶ Effie worked in the Spirit Camp in Tanana. I'm not sure if she worked in other Spirit Camps. She did work out at Howard Luke's Gaalee'ya Spirit Camp, but I'm not sure which group she was with. She rarely turned down an invitation to participate in meetings or activities, as long as she was available.

My daughter lives in Mississippi.²²⁷ And when my daughter was in Colorado,²²⁸ I went down and visited her. She went to college down there for three years, so I got to go there four times, and I've been to Albuquerque.

For a woman with no education, no money, just pinching pennies, I have traveled a very large part of the country. I've gone to Las Vegas.

How I went to Philadelphia was, I was chosen to appear on the Bill Cosby Show they used to have a long time ago. It was called "You Bet Your Life."²²⁹

When I was in Mississippi, we went to Memphis, and I went to what they called the Grand Old Opry.²³⁰ And then I got to see the Mississippi, because Mississippi River has always fascinated me, too. I got to go across the Mississippi, and on the Arkansas side we found an approach to go to the river. I walked in the Mississippi River. People said, "Oh no, don't, don't do that. It's dangerous." But, you know, I was raised around the river all the time. I walked in there, and I could really say that I washed my feet in the Mississippi River. I thought that was really something, because I never thought that I'd see the day when I'd do that. I don't care to see the big towns really, but I've been in Louisiana²³¹ over-night. My son-in-law works in a rig out in the bay, out in the Gulf of Mexico, so we got to go down there. So I got to see

²²⁷ Cindy lives in Mississippi and took Effie around Mississippi and neighboring states.

²²⁸ On a Thanksgiving visit I asked Mom where she would like to travel to over the school break, and she said Albuquerque, so we drove to Albuquerque, Santa Fe, Taos (where we had Thanksgiving dinner) and back to Durango, Colorado.

²²⁹ Effie was a contestant on that show and partnered up with a young man to answer questions. We have a taped video recording of that show.

²³⁰ In Nashville, Tennessee

²³¹ They stayed in Grand Isle, Louisiana.

deer. We got to see wild deer on the side of the roads and out in the field and elk.

Oh, I just really enjoyed those old farms in Colorado. We used to go out riding with my daughter. I met an old woman that is in her nineties. When she was small, they didn't have any boys in the family, so she was the one that helped her daddy plow the field with horses and stuff.²³² So I talk to old people, I talk to anybody that would listen to me. Really, I think I have had more than my share of education in my life. And it wasn't education you learned in a book, it was education you learned by experience! And so I don't know what else I want to see.

One time I was telling my girlfriend²³³ - we were playing cards here at the house and I tell her - "You know, I'd like to go to Vancouver." I didn't know that Vancouver was so big.

I always thought that Canada just had small towns, because when we went to Haines, for the American Legion, we went over...where was that, where you go over the White Pass?²³⁴ Anyway, when we went to Haines, we took a boat, and then we went up to Skagway. Anyway, I got to go over the White Pass, but I ran out of film, so I didn't even get to take a picture. We went to Whitehorse, but I didn't see much of Whitehorse, we just stopped there and went to the bathroom and kept a'going, coming back to Fairbanks.

²³² That woman's name was Helen, and she owned a little convenience shop out by the Lemon Dam on a county road outside of Durango on property that used to be a ranch. They had a couple of good visits.

²³³ Edith "Edie" Szmyd was a long-time friend of Effie's. She and her husband, Al, used to go to Effie's house to play cards and share dinner just about every week. They also fished and picked berries together, and I believe they hunted together a couple of times.

²³⁴ The White Pass narrow gauge railroad runs from Whitehorse, Yukon Territory, to Skagway, Alaska.

So I didn't have no idea of how big the towns in Canada were until I saw pictures of Vancouver in a magazine, and it was so huge. So now my girlfriend, Edie, and I are going to take a one-week trip. We're going to see Victoria and Vancouver.

I think that will be the end of my traveling, because at eighty-one, I don't think it's wise for me to travel any more. Anyway, I still got lot more to say about my life here at home.

I had plans to go to Kobuk this past week, but my girlfriend²³⁵ that I was gonna go see there (she's a school teacher) had to come in for surgery, so she's here with me now. So, I don't know if I'll ever get to see Kobuk, but that was one of my dreams, too. I can't say whether I'm going to go or not, because time is running short. Plus I've got to babysit my grandchildren, not babysit, just keep watch over them while their mama takes a vacation.

But in all my travels and everything, I have no desire to go to Hawaii on account of my allergies. And Hawaii is for rich people or just something to do. But when I do something, I like it to be for a purpose, or someplace where I can gain something, gain knowledge of how people live and everything like that. Hawaii has just never been my thing. And right now, if I went to Hawaii, it would be hard on my allergies, on account of so many flowers and stuff. And I can't go out in the sun because I'll break out on my face. I have to be careful of where I go, so when I do travel, I travel mostly in the wintertime, when I know the heat won't be too bad.

²³⁵ Patty Elias was teaching in Kobuk.

9.3 Teaching Young Friends About Moose, Preparing Skins

Effie had a very strong respect for moose, since they had always been so important in her life. She was always thrilled when moose entered her yard. The *Fairbanks Daily News Miner* ran a photo of a moose in her yard in 1989.²³⁶



Fig. 9.3.1 News Miner Photo of Effie and Mary with Moose

OK, a little while ago while we were on a break from recording, I stepped out the door. The snow is melting in my yard, and I can see moose poop in my yard. I live in Graehl, right close to the slough. In the wintertime, there's always moose coming around here. They walk through the yard and everything, and we don't bother them, and they're comfortable around here.

²³⁶ *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, February 10, 1989, page 1.

This moose that was in our yard, that stays around here most of the winter, was orphaned. We used to see it with its mother up on the Hamilton Acres side, but I don't know what happened to his mother, and he's alone now.

One day he was walking on the slough, and he fell in the river.²³⁷ Some guy on the snow machine saw it. He got help, and they pulled him out of the water. The moose was so used to seeing people all the time that when they pulled him out of the water, he didn't fight them. He was so thankful to be out, because they made sure that he was up on his feet. There was a picture in the newspaper, and he was actually rubbing his head along the man's arm. So, I thought that was really great. We all have protective feelings toward that moose. We just don't know what's gonna happen to him later on, but right now, he's sort of the pet of the neighborhood.

A couple of years ago, I had another moose that used to always come around my place. I have a big birch tree in my yard, and she nibbles on that and walks around the house and everything. One time she even kicked one of my dogs, when she was walking past the doghouse.

She was around my house for about four years. She kept coming around here. One time she also went into the river. My daughter and I were taking a walk with my two little grandsons one morning. We saw her in the water...but she was on the other side of the river, and there was this big open water space between us and where she was.

²³⁷ The slough runs between Graehl and Island Homes and into the Chena River. The moose broke through the ice on the river.

In order to try to do anything, I would have to go way up the river and get on that side. I wanted to go over there and chop the ice so she can get ashore, but I wasn't dressed warm enough. Somebody said they called Fish and Game, so just leave it, that they were gonna come.

We left it, because I hated to see her suffer. It was fighting...it couldn't reach the bottom. She was swimming and trying to fight to get up on the ice. She never had the sense to turn around and come back on this side where she might have been able to reach the bottom and get out of the water.

We didn't know until later that it was two hours before she got help, and by the time they pulled her out of the water she was so exhausted that she died. I felt so bad! I felt so bad. I said, "Why do I listen to people? Why didn't I go over there and walk across the river and chop the ice and free a pathway for her to come?" Somebody said, "You know, don't fool around with nature." It was a Fish and Game person, and he said it wasn't right if I tried to help that moose or any animal get out of water.

Now this winter when the boys saved that moose that fell into the ice, they made a big story about it in the newspaper. So, maybe I could have been able to do something, because I know that moose was very familiar with people, and she wouldn't have been scared of me. Even if she was scared of me, at least she might of went back across and maybe got some footing on the bottom and been able to save herself.

While we're still on the subject of moose, I'm gonna keep on talking about it. A long time ago, when the Native

Association²³⁸ first started, I had an unfinished moose-skin here in my cache. The Native Association wanted something for the children to do, so they asked me if I could demonstrate something in our Native culture. So I thought, "Well, I'm gonna take that moose-skin down and scrape it in the water, wring it out, and tan it with the kids." I wasn't getting paid, they just asked me to do that.

I did that with the kids watching. I scraped it good in the water with a tanning solution...I don't remember exactly what I used at that time. Then we wrung it out. That is like a big art, to wring a moose-skin just right. You fold the moose-skin across the butt end of the moose-hide, cut little holes, and you put sticks around it. Then you fold it from the outer belly. You roll the sides up until they come together, and it's just like two rolls of a hot dog. Then at the neck, you have a certain way to fold it in, with a piece of canvas inside. And then you stick a stick, about an inch and a half diameter and about five foot long, in there and then you tie the butt end to a tree. You pull the skin, and it's really heavy when it's wet. You pull that skin out with that stick through the neck of the skin, and then you start twisting it...and you twist it and twist it and twist it and keep twisting it until it gets real tight. The tighter it gets - it turns into a ball, until it's just a big ball against the tree.

²³⁸ The Fairbanks Native Association was incorporated in 1967 as a non-profit organization.



Figs. 9.3.1, 9.3.2 Working on Moose Skins with Friends

We did that, then I dried the skin. The Native Association was down on Second Avenue someplace - I don't remember where, it seems like where our church is, I don't remember.²³⁹ There was a tree out in the backyard, so I put a pole across it to put the moose-skin over to scrape it. So, the kids were enjoying scraping it and everything. I don't know what I did with the rest of that moose-skin, because I don't think I ever finished it.

That got me reminiscing about other things. Then later on, the Native Association, or the School District, or JOM,²⁴⁰ asked me if I could have a class in the summer-time down at Alaskaland,²⁴¹ so the tourists could see. They had a bunch of people sign up that wanted to learn how to clean a moose-skin. I sent out word ahead of time that I wanted a moose-skin that was not cut up, just one whole piece. I got a couple like that.

Down at Alaskaland, we cut the hair off and we scraped it, then we fleshed it. I had the students make a flesher. A flesher is used to clean a moose-skin and is a tool by itself. I can't describe it. They made a couple of them.

²³⁹ Effie's Church was St. Matthew's Episcopal Church on First Avenue, by the power plant.

²⁴⁰ Johnson-O'Malley Program, administered through the Fairbanks Native Association.

²⁴¹ Formerly known as Alaskaland, the Fairbanks site is now called Pioneer Park. There used to be a Native Village there that demonstrated Native skills and sold Native crafts for tourists during the summer.

We were cleaning a moose-hide, and we had some other people tanning a beaver-skin. We had two weeks of a really good time. The weather was pretty good that whole time too. I don't know what happened to those skins, either, except I gave one to the Native Association to do something with, for a summer camp or something. I don't know what they did with it.

Then, every once in a while I would pick up caribou skin. So, one time I picked up caribou skin, but it was cut in half. So, I sewed it together and I dried it. I wanted to make a rug for myself, to carry around when we would go on a picnic and stuff to sit on. I didn't want the hair to get all over the car, so I put a lining on it.

I did not scrape the *begool* off of it. That's that tissue that's in between the skin and the meat of the caribou. I didn't scrape all that off good, and over the years it started shrinking and shrinking. It got real small. It's still good, I took it when I went to Huslia. And every time I go out camping, I take it. When we go on a picnic, I take it to sit on.

I said, "Oh, I want to get another one." So I got my son-in-law to save me a caribou skin. This time I fleshed it with a flesher, the same as you would clean a moose-skin, and I put a cover over the hair. I made two *taa ł*.²⁴²

They ended up staying on the Yukon River. After my son, Robert, built his cabin I left them over there.

In the meantime, I got another one - I made a *taa ł* - and so now my grandson and my son-in-law all have a caribou

²⁴² Taa ł (with barred L) is the Denakke'e' name for traditional mattress of hide with fur.

skin rug, or *taa í* , you know - mattress, or whatever you want to call it, for hunting.

I'm just so proud of my son-in-law, because he still takes it every fall when he goes out.

I got to be friends with a girl named Malinda,²⁴³ and she wanted to learn how to clean a caribou skin. People kept saying that they wanted to learn to do this. I knew that some wouldn't stick to it; they just talked about it but wouldn't do it.

Malinda and I got a caribou skin, and then Malinda started cleaning it. She cut the hair off, and she fleshed it alright. Then it came to graining it, graining it is when you take the roots of the hair off that attach to the skin - you have to scrape that all of that off to leave just the skin. She was just about halfway through, and she quit. I put it in the freezer.

I think that Patty and I started being friends when Frank brought her to the camp,²⁴⁴ and she was working on a moose-skin.

Earlier, after Andrew died, I told my sister-in-law²⁴⁵ in Tanana, "Keep an eye out for a small moose-skin. I just want to fool around with it."

So she called me. She had a skin of a moose that was killed in the fall-time. It was frozen, and somebody gave it to her. She said, "I have a moose-skin for you."

So, that spring after the weather got warm, when I could work on it outdoors and I could cut the hair off

²⁴³ Malinda Chase was one of Effie's young friends and pupils.

²⁴⁴ Frank Folger was Effie's younger brother. He lived in both Fairbanks and Tanana and loved spending time on the river.

²⁴⁵ That would have been Pinky Folger, who was married to Effie's brother, Roy.

outdoors, I went to Tanana, and I cut the hair off of it. My brother, Art Joseph,²⁴⁶ came by and looked at it. He took off and pretty soon he came back, and he brought me a knife. He said, "Try this one," and it was sharp.

So, I cut the hair off with that, and I still have that knife. I thought it was so neat because people were trying to help me. I cut the hair off, and then it was small enough that we could bring it in the house.

We started fleshing it. I started working on it early in the morning, and I worked on it for nine hours straight, fleshing it. When I wanted to take a break, Donna²⁴⁷ or somebody else would take over. It looked big. You know, I asked for a small skin, and this one looked sort of big.

I was doing this in Tanana, then I rolled it up and then brought it back to Fairbanks. I grained it and washed it. My daughter²⁴⁸ helped me. We washed it and washed it, because there could be no trace of blood left on the skin. Even when you take all the blood vessels out when you're cleaning the moose-skin, it's still got the animal juice in it.

We dried it out, and then I just left it. The next summer, when I went over to camp, I took it with me. It was dried out stiff, and I didn't know how I was gonna soak it because, gee, it was big.

It was raining at that time. When we first moved into Robert's cabin, there was like a little ditch starting. It

²⁴⁶ Art was Arthur Arnold, who was a well-known musician, sometimes called the Yukon Troubadour. Effie usually called him Arnie.

²⁴⁷ Donna Folger is the daughter of Roy and Pinky Folger. She is the Mayor of Tanana and works with children and families in the ICWA (Indian Child Welfare Act) Office for the Tribal Council.

²⁴⁸ I helped Effie with that hide. It was very hard work.

went down and it made like a saucer, about seven-eight feet wide or longer. I blocked it up and put Visqueen there and let the rain gather on it. That's where I put that moose-skin to get it soft.

Afterwards, I put it in the brain solution, and I tanned it. I tried to work on it, and it was *big*! It was real big. I worked on it for a little while and wrung it out and scraped it. And I wasn't getting anywhere. So I left it there until next year.

The next year I worked on it again. It took me four summers! I kept putting it in the water, it was so stiff. That moose-skin was bigger than a double bed sheet. I spread a double bed sheet out on the ground, and I put that skin on there and it was bigger than the sheet. I got stubborn, and I just kept on working on it.

Then one time I went to visit George Attla's mother when she was in Fairbanks.²⁴⁹ I was telling her what I was doing, because George Attla's mother tans moose hide real good - she's a beautiful moose skin tanner. Hers was the best moose skin I ever saw. A long time ago I bought a piece of skin from her, and it was really nice.

Anyway, I told her what I was doing, and I told her, "Aw, I'm gonna throw it away, I just keep working on it and I'm not getting anywhere with it."

Then, in her quiet way, she told me in our Native language, "Well, at least you entertain yourself with it." I thought, "Oh, my God, if she believes in me, she really believes that I can do it, well, I'm gonna try again." So,

²⁴⁹ George Attla is considered one of the best sprint mushers in history. His mother, Eliza, lived in Huslia and was visiting Fairbanks. Effie thought she might have been in for a medical appointment.

the fourth summer, I put it back in water again, I worked real hard at it, and I dried it, and I soaked it in water again, in brain solution, and I dried it.

I was working hard, scraping it, and it was still tough on the hips, where the skin is thicker. It was still pretty hard yet, but around on the belly it was soft.

So, I thought, "Well, I'm just gonna leave it. I'm gonna sew it together and smoke it." And just about that time, a boat came, and it was my brother, and he brought Patty Bowen over to visit me for a couple days. She came at just the right time, so she helped me sew the moose skin together. We had to sew it. You fold it length-wise, so you sew it down on the neck and on the rear-end. You don't sew the belly part - you leave about a two foot space, and then you make a skirt out of canvas. The skirt would be about two feet or more down, like a funnel, then you tie the moose skin up in the smoke house. You have to smoke it with rotten wood that comes from a spruce tree.

I went across the river from our camp. There's a big mountain, and we went over there and we looked around up on the side of the hill for a good stump. We found a good stump that was rotten and just right. It has to be dry, and the stump has to be all in one piece - not falling down deteriorated. It's real tricky to find a good rotten spruce.

After I got some of that spruce, we built a fire. We put this rotten wood in the fire and smoldered it for about a couple hours - two, three hours, or four hours, we just smoked it in there. The color of rotten spruce tree: red,

or pink, that's the color the moose skin is going to be. You have to make sure that it's got the right color.

So, we kept feeding it, a little at a time, and then I finally got it smoked just right. You tie the skin lengthwise, like the moose is walking. I take a little stick and put it inside to hold the skin apart, so it doesn't stick, doesn't fold together, or touch, and it's just like a big balloon.

The moose was shot in the rear, and one bullet-hole was right on that thick part, and that bullet-hole did not even stretch, during all that work I was doing on the skin. That bullet-hole was just the same, and I was scraping it hard trying to soften it up. I scraped through one layer of moose hide; the moose skin has layers and layers of tissue.

We took it apart and it was smoked just fine. And so the belly part, we used that for soles on boots. You know, when men are out, they gotta have good soles on their boots.

That tough hip part, I gave a piece to my granddaughter, and about two or three months later she gave it back to me, and she had drawn a picture on it. She drew a picture of a moose, with a wolf trying to attack the moose. And, golly, it was nice!

That fall, there was a potlatch in Tanana. Pinky was having a potlatch for her brother, and my brother, and several other people had a potlatch, combined together.²⁵⁰

²⁵⁰ The Potlatch was for Pinky's brother, Thomas (Beanie) Swenson, Frank Folger (who had died since he brought Patty to Effie's camp), and Mary Dick. I can't remember if there were others. Potlatches are traditionally held as celebrations or to honor someone. They are communal gatherings that are often attended by friends and relatives who might travel to attend. Food is served for breakfast, lunch, dinner and

So I took that piece of moose skin down, and I gave it to Patty Bowen for helping me, and she still has it on the wall in her cabin. When I first gave it to her, she was working in the school. She was a teacher, and she had it on the wall for the kids to see.

Later on, I gave my grand-daughter a piece of the skin off the other hip, and I told her, "You can cut it in half for your trouble of making it for me. You can save one piece for yourself." I gave her this big piece - not a real big piece, about twenty-four inches long, and about eighteen inches deep. It's not really square, it's just a shape.

I gave it to her to fix for me, and way afterwards she gave it back to me. She drew a moose walking, and there was a dead tree standing up, and there was two eagles on the tree. That's all, she just made it simple. She said she didn't want to ruin the grain of the moose hide.

When you're fleshing the moose skin, and you flesh it real good, the blood veins come out of the skin, and you could see them, and because I was working so hard on the skin, it made them more visible.

So, thanks to Mrs. Attla I did accomplish it. I always think of her, because, you know, when you're working, or doing something, you need somebody to encourage you. You need somebody to say a good word to you, and that gives you extra strength to try again.

9.4 Working With Children at Spirit Camp

Spirit Camps are held during summer months as a traditional skills learning opportunity for children. Children, counselors/teachers and Elders spend a week or two camping in a remote location without distraction.

Later on, I started another moose skin. One summer when the village of Tanana was having a Spirit Camp, I went down there to work. I took that skin down, and it was ready to grain - and so I grained it there with the children. I also had another little skin there that was just about ready to finish tanning that Catherine Attla²⁵¹ gave me when I was in Huslia one time. She gave me an unfinished caribou skin, so we were working on that with the help of the kids.

I finished cleaning it, and I dried it out, and in that two weeks time I was able to finish that skin, but I never finish tanning that caribou skin.

At the Spirit Camp, I was teaching the kids how to build a dip-net. There were some girls there that were cutting fish.

The boys had a fish-net in the water, and they were bringing fish, and the girls, the children, were learning how to cut fish.

I asked this girl that was cutting the fish if she could save me a couple of good pieces so I could show the children how to make salmon bellies. I had my salt with me and my bucket, so we cleaned the fish and put them in. I don't know how many days she saved two to three good fish

²⁵¹ Catherine Attla was a wonderful Elder, traditional teacher, and language teacher. Catherine lived in Huslia, on the Koyukuk River.

for me, but I had a bucket of salmon bellies that the kids helped me make.

There was one boy that was a really good worker, and he liked to help me. He was with me steady, working. He finished his dip-net, and then we had to make a frame for it and make a handle. I wanted a dry spruce pole, so I had one of the boys take me over to the mainland.²⁵² I went up on the bank and looked around for a good size pole that's skinny and long, not too fat at the base, not too big - just right for a handle.

We went back to camp and we made a yoke to put the frame on. This boy was helping me. He really was just watching me. We picked a long willow, and we put it on the frame and spread it on the yoke and made a loop. Then, the last day there, we were trying to hurry up and work. We finished tying the fish net onto the fish dip-net frame just as we were starting to eat supper. We were gonna break camp that night.

I brought some caribou leggings, and the children scraped that, and I also brought a caribou skin *taa l* that needed scraping, and that's before I started fleshing it, while it's raw. I scraped it after it dried, so the kids really had a good time, and they were good workers, the group that I had.

It was just wonderful that those children have so much power that they can do so much if they set their mind to it, and it was a pretty good two weeks.

Patty was with me at camp, so she helped me, working with the kids. That was my job; I don't know what the

²⁵² The Spirit Camp is held at Sixteen Mile Island up the Yukon River from Tanana.

other people were doing. I never went back to the other women, see what they were doing.

Patty and I had our tent back behind the smokehouse, and the other people had their sleeping quarters and stuff on the other side of the cook-shack where we ate, so I never went down there, so I don't know what they were doing, but we had a pretty good two weeks. Patty really helped me because she stuck to my group.

I gave that dip-net to the children. I told Nick, "Since you did most work on this, I want you to be in charge of this dip-net, but if anybody wants to use it, any of the children wants to use it, let them use, but you're the caretaker."

A couple of years after that I went to Tanana and Nick told me, "You know they took that dip-net back to Spirit Camp." I never did go back to camp again, because I'm getting old, and I'm having lots of problems, and my allergies were acting up, so I didn't want to.

Somebody stole that dip-net from the camp, and I felt so bad. Who would steal a dip-net from the children's camp? It really hurts my feelings that the children don't have a dip-net now.

9.5 Making a Drum, Visit to Kantishna

Effie was always busy, either making crafts that were familiar to her or learning new skills. She loved to challenge her abilities.

After my friend Malinda started cleaning that caribou skin, we just rolled it up and put it in the freezer. I started talking about what I could do with this caribou skin we had been working on. I knew I couldn't tan it, so I said, "I want to make a drum."

I wanted to make a drum and use that caribou skin to put over the drum frame. I kept on talking about it for about a couple of years, off and on, and then Amy Van Hatten gave me a frame that she made. She was gonna make a drum and never did do anything with that frame. It was a round frame, and she gave it to me and said, "You might as well use it."

So this spring, I took that frozen caribou skin out of the freezer, and I cut out a piece, enough to cover that frame, and I made myself a drum. My son-in-law had cleaned out a house where there was a fire, and they were throwing everything out. He found this rawmane in the cache, and so he gave that to me. I washed that rawmane and used that to tie the caribou skin together on the back side, and so now I have a drum that has a long story to it, and I'm pretty proud of that drum. I don't know if I'll ever do anything with it, but I made a drum stick to drum it with, and I was so proud of it. Somebody asked me if I wanna sell it, and I said, "No!"

Then last summer, I went to Kantishna, the Kantishna Roadhouse that Doyon owns.²⁵³ I went there to tell stories to the tourists. I was able to take the drum with me, and I show the people how I made the drum out of skin. I don't know how to sing, but I sang to them anyway. The tourists don't know (laughs), they just enjoyed it.

I sang and hit the drum, and one of the tourists wanted to buy it.

I said, "No, no...it's not for sale." I really enjoy working for the tourists. I went there twice last summer,

²⁵³ The Kantishna Roadhouse is at the end of the 92-mile road into the Denali National Park.

and the year before that I went down once. And if they ask me again, I'll probably go there. They don't pay me, I just do it because I like to go around and see new places. I like to up that highway and see the bears and the caribou, or whatever - the sheep up on the mountains and in the fields.

Also, Kantishna is sort of a historical place to me because I knew a lady who moved to Tanana later on that grew up in the Kantishna, the head of the waters, and it made me think of her. The Kantishna flows into the Tanana River, and it starts with the head of that river. It connects to Denali Park, where the tourist location is. It makes me want to go see the rest of the Kantishna River, but I don't think I'm going to be able to.²⁵⁴

The woman that lived there was Abby Joseph. When her husband died, she married Edgar Joseph from Tanana.²⁵⁵ Later on in years, they knew that I was still trying to work on skin, so she gave me a flesher that she got from my father's auntie, the auntie that raised my father.

When the first white men came in to the area, they brought metal files and stuff, and this flesher was made out of a file. It was pounded down to make a little blade, like an ulu. They put on a stick, and that belonged to her. Before she died, she gave it to Abbey, and before Abbey died, she gave it to me. She told me that she knew that I would be the one to make good use of it.

²⁵⁴ Effie didn't mention that her grandfather, John Folger, Sr., lived on the Kantishna as well.

²⁵⁵ Abby and Edgar Joseph are highlighted on the Tanana Jukebox Project along with Effie and others. The site can be accessed at <http://jukebox.uaf.edu/TananaJBX/Index.htm>

When I die, I'm gonna give the scraper to Flora Demoski, who is grand-daughter of the man that raised my father. They were young when they raised my father, and when they were real old, they helped raise their grand-daughter, and Flora is that grand-daughter. So that flesher will go to Flora. It's very precious, and I don't let nobody use it because I want to make sure that I don't lose it. It's just like a diamond to me. How people treasure a diamond, well that's how I really treasure that flesher, because it's got a big story behind it.



Fig. 9.5.1 Effie's Flesher

The handle of that flesher is made out of a dried birch. It was carved while it was still green and dried, and right now, that birch is hard, it's just like a rock. It's aged so well, and it was well taken care of, so I want to make sure that that flesher gets in my story, too.

But, if they ask me to go back to the Kantishna Roadhouse and talk to the tourists, I'll go ahead and do it, even though I don't get paid. I get a lot of satisfaction out of it. And the tourists just love any

information they can get, and I have a lot of experience and everything.

The first time I went down there, I was told to go to the railroad station, and Catherine Attla was going to meet me there, and we were going to go down together.²⁵⁶ When we got down to the railroad station, they didn't have a ticket for me. It was Saturday, and the Doyon office was closed, and there was nothing that we could do, so the train went ahead and went without us.

I told Catherine, "Well, let's go back to my house, I know a cab driver that said that he took somebody down to Denali Park for just one hundred dollars."

So we came back to my house. One of the guys that works at the depot brought us back. I called that cab driver, and he was a little reluctant.

I said, "Well, you said that you took those people down for one hundred dollars, could you take us down? Could you take Catherine and me down?"

Then he said OK, but we had to wait for a little while, because he wasn't quite ready. He took us down, and we gave him a forty dollar tip each, so it wasn't like he was out. But I felt sorry for him, because we took him away from his work (laughs).

He said it was OK, because he could visit somebody in Nenana on his way back. So, that was really a big joke, because we got down to the Park, where the train goes.

I said "OK, I'm supposed be on that train, so what do we do from here?" Nobody knew what to do. Morris Thompson

²⁵⁶ Doyon, Ltd. Purchased Kantishna Roadhouse in 1996 so this trip was probably within the first years of operation.

and them were supposed to pick us up, and they weren't there.

We called the Kantishna Roadhouse and said, "We're stuck down here, and we don't know what to do. We're supposed to come down there and tell stories to a bunch of people." The woman said to come on up here.

Morris didn't tell us to go up to the roadhouse, he just told us to go there, go down to the Park. We got on the bus at 1:00, and the bus went back to Kantishna, and we had a good time.

When we come back and we finally got ahold of Morris, they told us they were supposed to meet us there, and we were supposed to tell stories right there at the Park, not IN the Park, but AT the Park.²⁵⁷ That time we did get paid, because we did get a cab to go down and everything, and it turned out to be just a great big joke. It was a joke right from the start, because we just made it fun thing. We didn't care about the cost - we just made it a fun thing.

We got on a horse and buggy, and they took us down to the end of Wonder Lake. I always wanted to see Wonder Lake, because I had seen all the good beautiful pictures of Mt. McKinley, and there is always a lake in front. I got to see that lake, and we got to see a moose in that lake. It was showing off to us, and it was just wonderful!

Mt. McKinley was just beautiful - it was just like you could reach out and touch it. And I know those people we met that spent time with, and we palled around with...I know they're gonna take back a lot of beautiful memories.

²⁵⁷ I think that Effie meant that she was supposed to be at the Visitor's Center at the entrance to the Park, not at the Kantishna Roadhouse, which is at the end of the 90 mile road into Denali Park.

We stayed over-night in the hotel, and the next day was raining and it was just miserable. I said "Golly, how are we gonna get back to Fairbanks?"

Morris said, "Oh, don't worry about it. A plane will pick you up (at a certain time) and take you back to Fairbanks." So we had a very enjoyable ride, and we had so much fun, and Catherine is so much fun to be with that we just had a good time.

We came back to Fairbanks on the airplane and everything was just fine (laughs). I met some beautiful people there, and we got some pictures.

Chapter 10 Conclusion

10.1 Bringing Her Home

Effie had always maintained a strong relationship with the people of Tanana, and was recognized as one of their Elders, often visiting and attending functions.²⁵⁸ One of her closest friends was her sister-in-law Pinky (Elizabeth) Folger, wife of her brother Roy. Roy and Pinky had been married for forty-four years and raised nine children together. Pinky was a central figure in Tanana, a respected Elder and dearly loved friend to all. She had dealt with diabetes for years before she passed away on November 1, 2000. One year after her passing, Pinky's family in Tanana prepared for a dinner to mark the anniversary. They had started preparing for a memorial potlatch, which would happen at a later date.²⁵⁹

Effie flew up to Tanana on the morning of November 1, 2001, for the memorial dinner, which was scheduled for November 2nd. She and Patty Elias had been working on a translation into Denakke'e' of the hymn "In the Sweet By and By" to be sung at the gathering.

Effie's daughter, Dee, had picked her up at her house that morning and took her to Warbelow's Air Service for the flight to Tanana.²⁶⁰ Effie never did learn to drive. It was common for one of her children to drive her around, along with a myriad of other friends. She was also a regular customer of the cab companies²⁶¹ that did business on Front Street, close to where she lived.

Whenever Effie visited Tanana, she preferred to stay at the Elder's Residence,²⁶² where she could rent a private room and bath. There are usually rooms available for short-term guests as well as long-term residents. The Elder's Residence is comfortable

²⁵⁸ While she was employed Effie did not travel as much, but after retirement she traveled to Tanana more regularly. Effie received the "Elder of the Year" award at the annual shareholder meeting of Tozitna Corp in 1992.

²⁵⁹ The women in Tanana are skilled sewers - skin sewers and beaders. Many hand-made articles were prepared, and many items were purchased and brought to Tanana with the intent of sharing with everyone who came to Tanana to honor the life of Pinky.

²⁶⁰ Recently when I was sitting at Warbelow's Air Service waiting to catch a flight to Tanana, a cousin told me that Effie always bought a one-way ticket to Tanana just in case she was going home to die.

²⁶¹ There are two taxi cab companies in the same location, Yellow Cab and Eagle Cab.

²⁶² The Elder's Residence is an assisted living facility with 24 hour care provided by aides and a cook.

and serves as a sort of community gathering place. Meals are prepared for the residents, and there is always extra for community members and guests available for purchase. Several community people, like Josephine Roberts, are regulars for meals and companionship. Josephine usually drives to the Residence on her four-wheeler and stays after lunch to work on a jig-saw puzzle that is set up on the corner table by the back door and under a window that looks out to the Yukon River. There is always a jig-saw puzzle being put together on this table, with similar colored pieces on different plates. There are about five or six tables where people eat or sit and visit. The TV is usually on, and residents watch programs and the news every day. On a side table a coffee pot and hot water for tea is usually available. There are two bathrooms off to the side, which receive a lot of visitors. All in all, it is a pleasant place to visit.

That last day, when Effie was at the Elder's, she visited with both the residents and the people who stopped by. She joked and laughed with them and was in good spirits. She taught one of the residential aides a new card game. She did express that she was a little tired and was going to have a cigarette and go to bed. Effie was not a regular smoker or much of a drinker, but she liked having a cigarette and a Miller Lite in the evening. If she were playing cards she might have several of each, but generally she only had one or two cigarettes or beers on any given day.

There is no smoking in the Elder's Residence, so she walked outside to have her cigarette and to enjoy looking at the frozen river. The Yukon River always held so much fascination to Effie. She had a deep love and respect for that river. When she was done she turned to walk in the door to head to her room. She entered the door and collapsed on the floor. The residential aid, trained in first aid and CPR, tried to revive her, but Effie was gone. Effie had succumbed to a massive heart attack. Since efforts to revive Effie lasted past midnight, November 2nd was her date of death. That detail spared the date from falling on grandson Jayson's birthday.²⁶³

The aide called Janice Folger, one of Roy and Pinky's middle daughters, who is an aide at the Elder's Residence in Tanana but was not on shift at the time. She, in turn,

²⁶³ Jayson Pearson was born November 1, 1970.

called her sisters, and they went to the Elder's Residence to "take care of Effie." Taking care of her meant they would wash her body and dress her in clean clothes. They chose to dress her in a pair of pink pajamas that was in Effie's suitcase. People raised in the villages of Alaska normally take on duties, out of necessity, that people who live in an urban area would not think about assuming. There is not normally a coroner, a medical examiner, or a mortician in a village. Family members or friends take care of bodies as a display of respect. In many cases, people in the village immediately start preparing hand-made slippers, or knitted socks, gloves, or other clothing appropriate to the weather for the deceased to be buried in. Winter burials often call for the person to be dressed in a fur hat, parka, gloves or mittens and a warm blanket.²⁶⁴

In the case of Effie, her children wanted her returned to Fairbanks as quickly as possible. The Tanana cousins called Dee and Jim Linzner, Effie's daughter who had taken her to the airport for the trip to Tanana earlier in the day.

I was startled awake by a knock on my door in the middle of the night. Dee and Jim came over rather than call to bring me the horrible news. I will always appreciate that gesture. My husband Vince was in Anchorage for training; he didn't have to worry about returning to Fairbanks from his job at Prudhoe Bay. Only one flight a week flies directly from Prudhoe Bay to Fairbanks. He received a call in the middle of the night, disrupting his sleep. He was able to catch a flight to Fairbanks the following day, as there are several flights between Anchorage and Fairbanks every day of the week.

Dee and I had the unpleasant duty of calling other family members or making the decision to hold off contacting others.²⁶⁵ We needed to make decisions about how to bring our mother back home but could not make business calls until the next morning. The enormity of our situation began to sink in. Our mother, the center of our world, was gone, and we had to figure out how to handle what we knew would be a major event in

²⁶⁴ I am only familiar with the Athabascan customs from the Interior of Alaska, so the practices that I am speaking about are specific to the Tanana area. Doyon, Ltd., the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) Corporation of the Interior, sometimes donates their heritage designed blankets for the purpose of burial. Effie received a blanket with the design of James Grant, as he was originally from Tanana.

²⁶⁵ It was the middle of the night, and we knew that it would be better to wait to call some people. There was nothing anyone could do so we thought it better to let them get some rest, as the following week would be very busy.

not only the Native community, but in a larger scale. Effie was well known and well loved by people all over the country. The *Fairbanks Daily News Miner* interviewed the family and ran a front-page article about her passing and covered the funeral.

One of the hardest calls we had to make was to our youngest sister, Cindy, who lived in Mississippi with her husband and three daughters. Cindy always enjoyed the status of the baby of the family, and it is her nature to wear her heart on her sleeve. It was heart-breaking to know that she was so far away and would have to travel by herself to Fairbanks while in an emotional state, as it was not financially possible for her family to travel with her to Alaska. Besides being distraught over the death of her mother, she hated to fly. She and her husband sold a cow from their herd to purchase an airline ticket.

In Fairbanks, we had to get word out to others and decide where to host “tea.” It is the custom of Native people to open their homes to the throngs of well-wishers who come to offer condolences, bring food, or offer other types of help.²⁶⁶ Compounding the realization that there would be many people who wanted to pay their respects was the fact that my sister Mary and I both had the flu. Mary lives in North Pole, two roads off of Badger Road. Dee did not feel her house was large enough to entertain the numbers of people that we expected. I had opened up my house for tea when our younger brother, Ray, had passed away in 1999. It was overwhelming, and in this case we decided that we needed privacy for our young boys, who were very close to their grandmother. It was difficult to figure out what we had to do without the counsel of our mother. There are so many details to care for in a Native funeral.

Since we had grown up in Fairbanks and didn’t have much of the training in dealing with death that our cousins and relatives in Tanana had, we were at a loss about what would be expected of us. We were “city kids,” having grown up in Fairbanks. Our mother had never expected us to learn all the Athabascan customs that she still embraced.

²⁶⁶ A lot of cultures have similar customs, again, I am writing about things that I am familiar with. Two resources to learn about potlatches would be:
Nelson, Richard K. *Make Prayers to the Raven: A Koyukon view of the Northern Forest*, (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1983) pages 6, 12, 151, 182, 188, 20, 149, 151-52, 181-82.
Simeone, William E. *Rifles, Blankets, and Beads: Identity, History, and the Northern Athapaskan Potlatch* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995).

Prior to the event of our mother's death, we had learned customs rather randomly. My sisters and I had not attended a full funeral and potlatch in a village until our father died in 1978. At that time we learned a lot of the customs of the Tanana people. It was an awesome experience. We gave great consideration to how our mother would want us to handle each detail.

Before we did anything else, we had to get our mother home to Fairbanks. Dee took charge and started calling around. Warbelow's agreed to do a charter flight to Tanana to pick Mom up. Dee and Jimmy agreed to fly with the plane. They went to Warbelow's, who said that because Effie was already deceased, there were not many pilots who would take a deceased person who was not embalmed in their plane. They had to hire a private plane. They were told they would have to get a traveling box for deceased from the mortuary, but it was too big for the plane. There was one pilot who agreed to fly and said it was his privilege, as he knew and respected Effie. At first, Dee and Jim were told only one person could fly. Dee would not hear of splitting up and insisted they fly together. The pilot agreed to take out a seat, and there would be room for the both of them and a stretcher that had a zippered body bag. They agreed and flew to Tanana, where they were met at the airport and were taken to the Elder's Residence. Cousin Janice Sam met them at the door. Dee and Jim got to see Mother, who looked very pretty. They loaded the stretcher into the ambulance which would take them back to the airport with no flashing lights or sirens. The driver drove slowly around Tanana so Mother could say good-bye to everyone there and the River. The stretcher was loaded into the plane. Dee held the stretcher with one hand and held Jimmy's hand with the other.

The pilot said there was a storm coming, and he would take them home a different way and would fly Effie over the Kokrine fish camp one final time. They flew over the camp and could see the cabin. The pilot knew Effie and knew where the camp was. The flight was smooth, and they had a good trip back to Fairbanks.

Family members waited at Warbelow's as the plane taxied in to a stop. Fairbanks Funeral Home was also there with a hearse. It is surreal to watch a covered stretcher

being unloaded from a plane, knowing that your loved one is in the zipped bag. The people from the funeral home received the stretcher onto a gurney and got it into the hearse for transport. They asked that we give them time to prepare her before we came to see her, plus the medical examiner had to see her before signing the death certificate.

We had to wait until the next day to go and see her. In the mean-time, our sister Cindy arrived from Mississippi. We returned to the business of writing the obituary, buying gifts for the potlatch, and buying new clothes to dress our mother.²⁶⁷

The hardest part about losing our teacher and mentor was not having her to guide us on a daily basis. Somehow we were under the flawed impression that we could start studying from her at some obscure later time. We had all been so busy living our own lives, raising our children, and devoting time to our respective jobs that we missed out on a lot of the lessons that others sought out our mother for. Since we had been raised in Fairbanks, we were raised primarily in a western culture. We did not return to the village,²⁶⁸ we did not know all the residents of Tanana and did not know who was related to whom. As some of us have become more involved in the Native culture, working for Native organizations, we have learned more about family lines and connections. A couple of our brothers made strong and lasting connections to more villages than just Tanana. Kenny and Bob spent a lot of time in villages and got to know the lifestyle well. Bob became more connected to Tanana and Rampart than Fairbanks. Both also had great relations in Minto, Manley and various communities up and down the Yukon. The girls in our family all married non-Native men; Kenny and Ray both married non-Native women as well. Bob never married, though most of his significant relationships were with Native women. Of all of us, Bob was the most immersed in a traditional Athabascan

²⁶⁷ We (four sisters) chose to dress her ourselves, rather than have the funeral home dress her. Dressing and preparing the body is part of our Native custom. All clothes were new except for Mom's white doe-skin vest, which she had made. On it was her Raven pin, made by local artist Judy Gumm. We also styled her hair, and made sure that she looked natural, including having her glasses on. We were pleased that she looked good and peaceful. Since it was winter her hands were smooth and beautiful, not broken out.

²⁶⁸ As noted in Chapter Seven, I spent the summer of my ninth year in Tanana with my aunt and uncle, Mary and Phillip Kennedy. Mary was the younger sister of my father, Andrew Kokrine. My sisters never visited Tanana.

lifestyle, living on the Yukon hunting and trapping and fishing in the summer. He had a daughter, Dayna, in Tanana with whom he maintained a close relationship.

Effie had always been strongly connected to her church. She was raised an Episcopalian, starting with the Mission of Our Savior in Tanana. After moving to Fairbanks she had always been a member of St. Matthew's Episcopal Church on First Avenue – the beautiful log cabin church that faces out onto the Chena River.²⁶⁹

Father Scott Fisher, rector of St. Matthew's, and Parish Administrator Hilary Freeman were our saving grace when our mother passed away. They agreed to allow us to host tea in the parish hall of the church. We were able to have the food sharing and companionship happen there. We brought in photo boards and other mementos from our mother's life. Unfortunately, because we had so many details to take care of and because Mary and I were so sick, we were not there as much as people would have liked us to be. We had a potlatch to plan, gifts to purchase, place for the potlatch to be arranged, and a church larger than St. Matthew's had to be arranged for the number of people that we expected to arrive. My small family was Catholic, and we attended Sacred Heart Cathedral on Airport Way. The capacity of Sacred Heart Cathedral is 525, compared to a maximum of 200 at St. Matthew's. Father Ed Hartman agreed to allow us to use the Cathedral, with services officiated by Father Scott Fisher and the clergy of St. Matthew's, including Bishop Mark McDonald.²⁷⁰

Word spread that Effie had passed away. Articles appeared in newspapers around the state. Mary Beth Smetzer, staff writer for the *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, interviewed family members and wrote a lovely article with a caption under a photo of Effie stating, "Champion Dies."²⁷¹ Cards, letters and donations to help cover expenses started to arrive. People everywhere were so responsive. It lifted our spirits and was very comforting. Our relatives from Tanana came to help, and they were a God-send.

²⁶⁹ All of us children had been baptized into the church, and Mom tried to keep us connected to the church as we were growing up. I became a Catholic after marrying Vince, as his religion is important to him, as it was with his mother. Our children were raised Catholic.

²⁷⁰ Our family will be forever grateful for the assistance of the following clergy for the funeral services: the Reverend Anna Frank, the Reverend Steve Matthew, the Reverend Ginny Doctor, not sure who else.

²⁷¹ Fairbanks Daily News Miner, "Beloved elder Grandma Effie, 82, dies." Mary Beth Smetzer, Saturday, November 03, 2001, page A1.

People came from all over the state to pay their respects. Pinky's Memorial dinner was delayed, and the family planned a potlatch for the following year.

The service for Effie was wonderful with some unexpected turbulence. Members of St. Matthew's Episcopal Church offered readings, and the organist from St. Matthew's agreed to provide accompaniment to the music popular for use in Native funerals. We printed hundreds of beautiful programs that were made with the assistance of Robin Renfroe at Doyon, Ltd.²⁷² I spent time in the Board Room at Doyon typing the obituary, the words to the hymns, and the other details, such as pall bearers and participants in the service. Many of Effie's friends asked to be allowed to sing or were asked to sing during the service. Katherine Peter led the opening song, "In the Sweet By and By," in Chilig, the Gwitch'in²⁷³ version. Effie had said for years that she wanted Billy Demoski to sing "Will the Circle be Unbroken." I asked Patty Bowen (Elias) and family to sing "Farther Along," and Ida Ross asked if she could sing a special song, "God's Family," stating that she and mom had talked about it. There were also more traditional funeral hymns, like "Just a Closer Walk with Thee" and "How Great Thou Art."

Effie believed in the power of spirit, and her spirit was evident as we prepared for her services. Effie knew that she had a special power about her, and her oldest daughter, Ellie, possessed the same aura. They felt things, dreamed things, and had an intuition that was not common. Effie's spirit seemed to linger and show its presence several times during the time before her burial. The first that I am aware of was when I was working on her program in the Doyon boardroom. I was typing the words to the hymns that would be used, and some visitors entered the boardroom to view the wonderful display of museum quality artwork in the specially crafted alcoves. The laptop that I was using²⁷⁴ suddenly turned off. It was plugged in, so it wasn't lack of battery. I turned it back on and started typing again. It turned off a second time, and I realized that I had to wait until

²⁷² Doyon, Ltd. pays a death benefit to shareholders. They are extremely supportive to shareholders during crises. We also appreciated the support received from Fairbanks Native Association, Tanana Chiefs Conference, Inc., and the Native Village of Tanana. All of the Native entities were extremely supportive.

²⁷³ Katherine Peter was from around Fort Yukon and was an instructor/expert of Gwitch'in at UAF.

²⁷⁴ In 2001 it was not yet common in Fairbanks for people to own their own laptops, and Doyon was generous in allowing me to use one of theirs.

the visitors left. Once they left, I was able to turn the computer back on and continue typing. Two other instances that I remember were the organ at Sacred Heart going wild and playing a sporadic number of notes not usual in the particular hymn, and Billy Demoski's²⁷⁵ amplifier squealing loudly while he was demurely singing "Will the Circle Be Unbroken." I understood that those instances were an unusual existential presence of energy, which I attributed to my mother's spirit lingering, showing her approval and joy in the gathering in her honor. She always loved a good gathering!

Regardless of whether her spirit was present or it was coincidence that there were unusual circumstances during that week, her funeral was lovely. Sacred Heart Cathedral filled to capacity and many people were not able to enter. We did not learn that until later, as the family was seated up front after greeting guests as they entered. Some people had arrived early and led songs and fellowship. There is such warm comfort in the Native community during a funeral, a cloak of caring that helps a family survive unimaginable pain.

The coffin was hand-crafted, with the effort led by our brother, Bob, who, like our father and youngest brother, was a carpenter. It is another common practice for coffins to be built by the men and lined by the women. My sisters and I had helped to line the casket when our youngest brother, Ray, passed away in 1999. We did rely on our female relatives to remind us how many yards of satin material we needed to buy, how many yards of beautiful trim we would need to surround the border of top and bottom. We wanted her to be comfortable, so we put a lot of foam padding under the satin. It is a form of art to line a casket, and it was somehow comforting to be doing a physical effort that was such a huge part of letting her go.

Prior to the service, the tea went on at St. Matthew's Church for days. People brought in food to share, and they sat and visited. Meals and snacks were prepared for visitors and also for the mostly young men who were up at Birch Hill digging the grave in the cold November ground. It is customary for a Native person to be buried whenever they pass, summer or winter, no matter what the temperatures are. If the family is large

²⁷⁵ Billy Demoski is married to Flora Henry Kokrine Demoski. She was first married to Henry Kokrine, Sr., nephew to Andrew Kokrine. She married Billy after Henry passed in 1979 due to heart failure.

enough or known in the community, there is a group of men who work to prepare the ground. Warm food, coffee and water went up to the shifts of grave diggers. It was November, and it was winter. Digging the grave in frozen ground was a difficult task.

Effie had selected her own burial site. She wanted to be buried in the American Legion plot, and she had walked around and picked the spot that she wanted.²⁷⁶ She had walked around that area of Birch Hill to make a good decision and selected a spot with an unobstructed view of Fairbanks in the valley below. Her family had asked her to make Birch Hill her burial site, rather than to be buried in Tanana next to her husband, Andrew. The family did not make it to Tanana to visit the graves often enough and wanted her to be laid to rest in Fairbanks, where the majority of her children and grand-children lived.

The service in Sacred Heart Cathedral was uplifting, with Father Scott Fisher starting off with his booming voice, saying “I am the resurrection and the life saith the Lord...” No one does a funeral quite like Scott Fisher. He tells stories when he knows a person and adds a wonderful personal touch. He had several stories about Effie, including talking about how brilliant and red the Northern Lights were on the night that she passed. He was watching the sky in amazement and knew that something significant was happening in heaven.²⁷⁷

The coffin was covered by the large beaded moose-hide pall that belongs to St. Matthew’s Church.²⁷⁸ After the coffin was turned clockwise and wheeled out of the church, it was loaded into the large Suburban that the Fairbanks Funeral Home used for winter transport, as the hearse would not have made it up Birch Hill. Vince Freiburger asked the Funeral Director (we knew him fairly well due to all the funerals that we had participated in during his tenure) if he could drive Effie one last time. He was allowed to drive, and he led the procession through the streets and up to the cemetery. Once there,

²⁷⁶ Effie selected this grave site before the Native Cemetery came into use on Birch Hill. The Native Cemetery allows more artistic expression and fences, which were removed from many graves in the general cemetery under prior management. The fence around Effie’s grave was removed and many mementoes thrown away. Many Native graves have fences surrounding the graves, a tradition possibly borrowed from the Russian influence in Alaska.

²⁷⁷ The Northern Lights were also in beautiful display on the one-year anniversary of Effie’s passing.

²⁷⁸ The cover has its own story. Lee Oates purchased the large moose-skin to replace the black pall that was previously used for funerals. Hannah Solomon and Charlotte Adams did the beautiful beadwork.

there were more songs and prayers as Effie was lowered into the ground. Everyone threw a handful of soil on the cover box before the men started shoveling. A hand-carved cross, beautifully created by our friend Steve Kreinheder²⁷⁹ was erected in the process, and flowers were placed to cover the mound. Mary and Jerry Pearson brought a box full of their racing pigeons and released them. They flew up in the air, circled around, landed briefly in the surrounding tree branches, then lifted off and flew home. Father Scott instructed us that we had to be done before sunset, and we were. After another prayer, we descended the hill to prepare for the potlatch.

Another very important role that men fulfill for a funeral and potlatch is hunting for moose for both soup and cooked chunks that are handed out for dinner. Native people can get a special permit to hunt moose any time there is a potlatch for cultural and traditional use. Moose is one of the staples of a potlatch, and hunters will go out searching until they find a moose that will feed the gathering. I do not know how many moose fed the hundreds of people at Effie's potlatch.

We were very grateful that Fairbanks Native Association²⁸⁰ had a business partnership with a Bingo vendor that was located in the Old Elk's Lodge downtown between 4th and 5th Avenues. There were so many guests that we had to feed people both upstairs and downstairs. It was very unusual. Dayna Folger said that she has never seen a potlatch on two floors before. She remembers helping her mother, Donna, make three huge batches of Indian Ice Cream.²⁸¹ They had to look for a place with a commercial mixer to make that much ice cream. They were granted access to the kitchen at Hutchison High School. The David Salmon Tribal Hall had not yet been built as a place for the Native community to hold potlatches, but using a Bingo hall certainly

²⁷⁹ Steve was a carpenter and good friend with our younger brother, Ray, who passed away in 1999. Steve also made his cross, and it was so perfect that we wanted him to also make Effie's cross. Hand-made crosses are another beautiful tradition for a Native funeral.

²⁸⁰ At the time of my mother's passing, I was Executive Director of Fairbanks Native Association. Members of the Board of Directors helped provide moose for that potlatch as well as extending their generosity in other ways. The programs of FNA were very helpful, as was Doyon, Ltd. and Tanana Chiefs Conference. The Native community is extremely generous and helpful during difficult times.

²⁸¹ Indian Ice Cream is made with berries, shortening (like Crisco), crackers (Jersey Cream) and sugar. Another variation of Indian Ice Cream is made out of creamed cooked white fish.

demonstrated the need for the Tribal Hall, and Tanana Chiefs Conference, Inc., filled a great void in building the long log structure that sits on the south side of the Chena River.

We had spent a couple of days shopping for gifts for guests and particularly the people who helped out. It is customary to give gifts to the hunters, grave-diggers, sewers, cooks, casket makers and liners. There are so many people to think of and to thank. Putting on a potlatch is a tremendous amount of work, but there are healing benefits that are hard to describe. We will always be grateful for the extended family members, community members and others who pitched in to assist.

I do remember that we shopped for the potlatch whenever we could between the other duties that we had in preparing the funeral. At the potlatch there was a large area in the middle of the upstairs where we placed gifts on blue tarps for the give-away, which would happen after everyone was fed. There were volunteers working away in the kitchen organizing the food. The food at a potlatch normally consists of moose soup, cut up moose meat, cooked salmon, salmon strips, macaroni and potato salads, crackers, cakes, and Indian ice cream. There were other dishes, but I can't remember what. I know that there were some special pieces of moose meat that are given out to influential people and Elders. I was tasked with distributing that box of meat, which was very difficult. I hated to pass up some people and target selected people, but that is the custom, and I tried to make good decisions. I sincerely hope that I did not slight anyone.

We were exhausted after the potlatch was done. There were still details to take care of before we returned to our jobs or regular schedules. People had been very generous with donations, including food and money. We made sure that expenses were taken care of, and we gave remaining money to St. Matthew's Church to help pay for the stained glass windows that were being designed and produced to replace the old pane windows.

10.2 Life After Effie

Nothing could be the same in our family. Our mother was the center of our family, the one who drew everyone together. It is so easy to get so busy with your own immediate family and lives that you spend less time with others in the family. That is the

biggest difference that I have noticed. We do not have the large gatherings that include the whole family any longer, like holiday meals with over thirty people.

Our oldest brother, Bob, passed away one year after Effie passed. He was alone in his cabin on the Yukon River. He most likely suffered a heart attack or stroke. Since we are no longer required to have an autopsy when someone dies of natural causes, we did not request one. It did not matter. His friends from Rampart and the Alaska State Troopers got him and his dog, Missy, to Tanana. That was the important thing – he was well taken care of there. Again, our family flew to Tanana for funeral and burial.

Clearing out Effie's house was a chore! She held on to things, a trait that some of her children inherited! It took a very long time to undo what some people referred to as Effie's museum. Other people have to go through the same thing after losing their parents, so no dwelling on that subject. After giving things to family members, packing boxes to deal with later and several garage sales the house was empty. Some friends had stopped by to sit in the living room before it was dismantled. There had been so many good visits in that living room over the years, so many meals shared, and so many items crafted.

Several family members have lived in the house over the years, along with several other renters. Effie's youngest daughter, Cindy, moved back to Fairbanks for a while and fixed the house up with new paint, trim, wall-paper and lots of love. It looked cute and was very cozy. Being 4,500+ miles away from her daughters and grandchildren was difficult, and she moved back to Mississippi for three years.

Cindy returned to Alaska in May of 2012 to seek employment and possibly relocate permanently. It appears promising that she will stay in Alaska this time, which is her preference.

At present Effie's son, Kenny, is living in the house with his wife, Debbie. Their children and grand-children are regular visitors, so the house is still full of family. It is difficult to say how long the old house will last. It cannot last forever, and neither can the old cabin next door. For now, they are still standing!

Dee lost her husband, Jimmy, in 2004; Mary lost her husband, Jerry, in 2011. The loss of a significant person in your life alters your life forever. It is difficult to adjust without your life partner – or your mother - but it is not impossible.



Fig. 10.2.1 Effie with all Eight of Her Children and Grandson at 70th Birthday Party



Fig. 10.2.2 Effie in her White Doe Skin Vest

*Walking, I am listening to a
Deeper way. Suddenly all my
Ancestors are behind me.
Be still, they say. Watch and
Listen. You are the result
Of the love of thousands.*

Linda Hogan, Native American writer

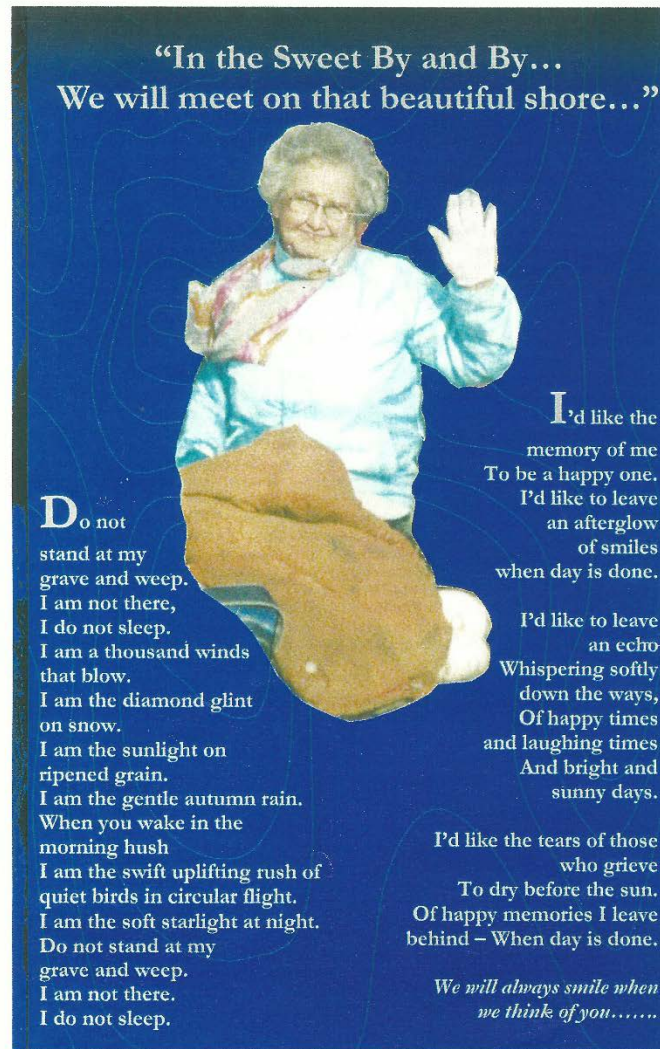


Fig. 10.2.3 Back of Effie's Funeral Program

Appendix I

When Effie was talking about moving to Fairbanks, she wanted to explain how she gained possession of Joseph Nicholia's boat, which was used to haul the dogs to Fairbanks behind Jimmy Huntington's boat. She also wanted to explain the long relationship with the Esias and Mary Dick family. This was a pretty long story, so it was moved to the Appendix so it could be included without detracting from the story of the move.

I'd like to back up for awhile, back up to the time I was in Tanana, and what led up to me using Joseph Nicholia's boat to bring my dogs up to Fairbanks. It's a long story. It started way back, after Andrew broke his leg and he was getting back to where he could work again.

We were staying at Tom Butler's camp. We heard that Esias and Mary Dick's little girl was sick. They were in a fish camp below us. In those days anybody with a boat would go and check on others to see what's going on. So we went down there, and they said the baby was sick. She was just almost three years old. So we went down there and we picked her up and took her all the way up to Tanana. That was quite a ways, from below Kallands,²⁸² around Nine Mile, and took her up to Tanana. That was the start of me watching out for Mary Dick and them. I have a lot of stories concerning how I helped her and what I did to help her.

I'm gonna start back, when we were in Tanana in the Spring-time. I used to love camping. I love to go out camping. One year Andrew was gonna go muskrat hunting, and

²⁸² Kallands was a community about 30 down-river from Tanana. Andrew spent several summers fishing in Kallands, as he mentioned in a short taped recording that is in the Oral History archives (given to me by Bill Schneider. I could not find this tape referenced when I did a search).

in order to do that you have to get out of town, get away from Tanana because there are no lakes and things there. So I said, "I'm gonna stay over Hay Slough. I wanna stay over Hay Slough." Hay Slough is across the Yukon River, up the Tanana River a little ways. There's a big slough there that goes way back. It's miles long - at least twenty miles or so. I said I wanted to stay up there so I'll be able to go dip-net fishing and maybe put a fish net in after the ice goes out. Sometimes, if we're lucky, we can get some ducks or something. I said, "OK, I'm gonna go over there."

Andrew and I went over, and I selected the spot to put my tent. We shoveled out the snow so that the ground will have chance to dry out a little bit. Mary Dick and them said they would go with me. Then, two other couples said they would go with me, so there was four tents. People sort of leaned on me, like for protection out in the woods.

Before the snow melted and before the river start opening up, the men would build a canoe. They'd go out and get spruce ribs for the canoe and bend it and make the canoe while they can't do nothing else. And they built their own paddle. Men used to make their own paddle out of spruce wood. They used spruce for paddles because the spruce tree never sinks, it'll always float. So, whenever you drop a paddle, it always floats nicely, and it's nice and strong wood.

Andrew was building his canoe, and we got the canvas over the frame and he was finished with it, except for the painting. With the canvas that was left over from the canoe, I took it and I made boots for my children. For my

one little girl²⁸³ that was just starting to walk around and would fall down a lot, I made this canvas boots that went above her knee, so when she fall down, she won't get wet. We made use of everything, we didn't throw nothing away!

Mary Dick's little boy was sick; then the boy died. It was very late in the spring, and the Tanana River had already gone out! When the baby died, we did not want to bury him over at the point of the island, so the group talked it over and decided to try to make it back to Tanana. We had very good dogs. They obeyed us, and they do whatever we tell them to do. The men said, "Well, we're gonna go over town." The Tanana River ice already went out, and the Yukon ice goes out two weeks later. At Hay Slough, we went across the point. We came out on the mail trail. There was ice still sticking out from the Yukon River side, even if the Tanana River was open. Right to Tanana the ice was pretty solid, but was sticking out. There was lot of water near the beach.

Andrew and I put a box in our big sled. In those days we used to get gas in gasoline cans, and there was two five gallon gasoline cans in each wooden box.²⁸⁴ We always used those wooden boxes for furniture, or anything. We put one of these boxes on top of the sled, and we put this baby's body on top of that box. We lashed it on real good to the sled. Andrew and I said, "We'll be the leader."

Esias and them came behind us. Esias was the father of the boy that just died. We went across there. There was

²⁸³ This was probably Mary Pearson.

²⁸⁴ The gasoline cans were rectangular, which fit well into the rectangular wooden boxes. These boxes were used for multiple purposes, including shelving.

places where there was no snow, and then we would hit snow, so it wasn't too bad going. We got to the bank on the Yukon River side, after we crossed this portage. Andrew looked at the ice, and he said, "OK." He said, "We gonna try it."

We told our dogs to go, and they swam into the water at the beach, then they got on the ice, and they had the strength to pull us through. When we got to the other side of the river, there was a lot of shore water there, too. So we just told our dogs to go ahead and go through the water. They got on the bank, and we were on the Tanana side of the Yukon River.

We looked back behind us, and could see that Esias, Mary, George and Pauline Yaska were all together in another sled, and they were following us. We all made it over there, then we went to town, and right away that same day they built a coffin. They built a coffin and started digging a hole up at the Mission Cemetery. The town, where they had to get their supplies, was three miles down, so they had to hurry up and make a coffin and go back up and dig the grave, so we were trying to just do our best.

Back to our camp at Hay Slough, while Andrew was building the canoe, I took three dogs and I went down to what you call Horseshoe Lake, right below where we were camped. I went back to Horseshoe Lake and I set traps. Oh, I just loved that setting traps. Again, I had to go out through the shore ice, but my dogs go right through the shore ice, and after I got on the ice I was able to go muskrat house to muskrat house. I had caught twelve

muskrats. I skinned them and hung them up, and that's what we took to eat when we went over for the funeral.

The next day we buried this little boy. I took the muskrat I had and shared it with the workers, the people that helped us, and with a couple of old people living at the village yet at that time. We had muskrat and tea.

In the meantime, the Yukon River ice, the part that we crossed the day before, well the ice broke.²⁸⁵ Right above where we crossed, the ice went out, and we could not go back across the river. The river was open then from above Mission down.

We went back down to Tanana and we borrowed a poling boat. Esias, Andrew, and George Yaska and them, we all paddled across the river. We got back over to camp. I don't remember what happen to George Yaska and them. I think since they left their dogs in town they broke camp and went back over in the boat with Andrew.

Andrew had already finished his canoe, so he brought his canoe in the boat and paddled back over after he returned the poling boat to Tanana. We stayed in camp, and then Andrew went back over to Tanana, since our dogs was in Tanana. He decided to stay in Tanana, while I stayed over Hay Slough by myself, which I was used to. I enjoyed it, and the kids had a ball. They just really had a good time.

It takes two weeks, and maybe another week, for the Yukon ice to clear. By that time it was Memorial Day, so Andrew came back over with a boat. He came back over in the canoe, and I had a peter bar that Joseph Nicholia gave me

²⁸⁵ The "break-up" of the Yukon River ice is a spectacular sight, with ice loudly crashing and heaving. Some river break-ups bring flooding to villages along the river when the ice jams and creates rising waters.

that belonged to his wife, so I put the kids in the peter bar, and we went over to town on Memorial Day and tended to the graves. A peter bar is a big canoe, like you see around town. Andrew was in his little canoe.

The next day we got a boat and we came back, and Andrew said, "You're gonna break camp, you're gonna move back over to town." Oh, no! I hated to leave.

We still had a couple of dogs over there at camp, and I had my kids and everything. When we went to Tanana, I had left Mary Dick and Helen Grant, and whoever else was there alone over-night. When we landed there in the boat, and I came up the bank they said, "Don't you ever leave us alone again - don't you ever do that." Oh, God, they were just mad at me, and I didn't know why. They said they heard something during the night, and dogs was barking, and I wasn't there to protect them.

Andrew and I walked back on this pathway where they said they heard noise. We see where something had tore up the ground, like maybe a bear was walking down the road and turned in one little spot and we could see where the ground was torn. We said, "Well, that was a bear, walking down the road, and when he turned the dogs start barking." They were mad at me!

That was the last of my spring break. It was really nice to be out. Those were really the good times for me. Even though we didn't have nothing, I was able to go down to the mouth and dip fish. Then, when the river opened, I went down and put in fish net at the mouth of the slough. I was giving, supplying fish to the other girls. I knew how

to take care of myself, and that's what I loved - getting out and doing things.

When we got back to town, then we had to tighten our belts again, 'cause in the spring-time, there was nothing to eat in town. There was no meat. There were a few canned goods, but people don't have money for canned stuff. Eating wildlife, like eating fish, or if we get ducks...that was really a treat. We had no refrigerator in the stores. It was really hard. You'd have to live it to understand it.

OK, I'm still getting back to how come Joseph Nicholia was so important in my life - because he was. He helped me one spring. About 11:00 at night I was home alone, and I heard somebody at the door. I went and checked, and here it was Joseph Nicholia's wife, Dora. She said, "I'm tired, I want to rest."

She said there was a party at her house, and she wanted someplace quiet. So I gave her a cup of tea and put blankets and stuff on the floor and made a place for her to lay down, and she stayed there all night. The next morning, she was sick.

I went down to the hospital and talked to the doctor. He said, "Oh, she's just probably got quick consumption²⁸⁶ or something." The doctor wasn't very nice. He was just there...that's all.

I went back home and tried to make her as comfortable as I can. She was still not doing good, so I went back down to the hospital, and I told the doctor, "She's having a hard time breathing. I don't know what to do with her."

²⁸⁶ Quick consumption was a term for tuberculosis, as it was the most common wasting disease.

He said, "Oh, just put a lot of pillows behind her, and set her up in a sitting position." So that's what I did. On the third day she was still not getting any better. She went back home, and she died that night.

In those days nobody really cared how a person died...we just died.²⁸⁷ Joseph Nicholia knew how much I helped his wife, so that spring when we were moving to Hay Slough... Joseph said, "You know, you're a good woman, and I want to give you something."

He said, "I have a peter bar (the one that I mentioned already that I used) down at our camp. If you go down and get it, you could have it." He says, "You're the only woman that I think deserves to have that canoe."

I took care of his wife when she was real sick, and that boat was a treasure to me. I had my own transportation. I could play around on the Slough or whatever without having to borrow a boat from anybody, and it was a very precious gift. So, that's the canoe I was using over Hay Slough when we moved and when we went back over for Memorial Day. I would put the children in the peder bar, and Andrew would take one child in the canoe with him, and we would paddle across the river - without a care in the world.

So, when I was moving to Fairbanks, that's why I was in such good grace with Joseph. He loaned me his little poling boat that he didn't let anybody else use - just me. So there's a big chapter in my life that's connected to

²⁸⁷ I believe that what Effie meant was that there were no doctors or coroners to sign death certificates, and often there was no diagnosis of cause of death, not that they didn't care. They took care of community members who passed away, often without the deaths being registered.

them. And really, nobody used to like Joseph, because they said he was cranky, but, really, he was a nice man when you got to know him. I have a lot more stories I could tell about my experience with them.

Appendix II

Processing Big Game

To the families a long time ago, the process was very important when you kill a moose, how you take care of the meat, because you would use every part of the moose. If you're gonna save the skin, you have to skin the moose without cutting holes in it. You have to cut it evenly down the belly and across to the arms so that the moose skin will fold easy and correctly when it's being tanned. You save the head and the brains, because you use the brains for a solution to tan your moose skin. I do not know what they used to save the brains in long time ago, but when I was small people used to save it in a thick canvas bag, and they just hung it up and tie it up good and let it ferment. Then when they tan the moose hide, they put the fermented brains in the water, like a solution, or soap, and that was the tanning solution, using the chemicals that's in the brain. The brains are very important.

When you save the head, you've got the moose nose, which you can cook separately like a kind of a snack food. You can make soup out of the head.

When you cut the moose open you take the heart out, the liver, and the kidneys. When you're taking the stomach out, there's a certain side that you put it on, and you take the lace off the stomach. The lace is what you call the fat tissue that covers the belly skin. You can take that all off as a big piece, like a yard of cloth. You can hang it on some brushes; then you take out all the guts. You save the stomach. The moose has three stomachs: one is the main bag, one is the tripe, and one is the bible.

When the moose grinds its food, it goes through three channels before it's ready to go down the guts. You can eat the tripe and the bible. You wash it real good, and you boil it up with a little salt and just eat it. You can also eat the big part, the big belly. You dump it out and scrape it clean.

In the winter time, if it's cold enough, you can save the blood. You take a stick and put a stick in the opening of the gut bag and seal it up with blood inside, or half full of blood, and you can save that for dog food.

A long time ago, people used to save that for when you're boiling meat. You just put a hunk of blood in there for flavoring, 'cause it's very rich, and you eat the heart, liver, kidneys. The only thing that you throw away is the lungs.

With the rest of the guts, you push the moose droppings all out, open it up, and wash it. That moose guts is very tasty in your soup or your stews or when you're baking meat, to just put it in there for flavoring. I just love it. I still save that part of my moose for myself. I taught my son and my son-in-laws how to save those things because it was such good eating.

You clean the meat the best you can. The best way is to hang it up right there to let the blood drip out. A lot of people now-a-days go hunting with a boat or in cars, and they don't get to hang their meat.

You take and use everything. You could even boil the foot, and it's good eating. It's no different than pigs' feet. It's rich, and it's very good eating. You know, when we were in camp, we just tried everything. We take

the little knuckles in the moose's foot, and there's a little marrow in there, and it's really sweet and delicious. We split the bones and eat the little marrow, even if it's just a half a mouth full.

Then you take the marrow from the legs of the moose, and you save that part. When I was small, my mother used to put that away and use it for butter. As long as we had marrow, she'd always use it for her butter. It's also good to eat with dry meat.²⁸⁸

There's a lot of fat inside of a moose. The kidney is just a big gob of fat, and you save that fat, and you can render it and make tallow.²⁸⁹ A long time ago people didn't have stores to go to, and they didn't have money to buy stuff. Moose fat was very important to save for cooking and stuff like that.

We used to even eat the cracklings, when you make the grease. To make good cracklings and keep a nice white tallow, you can't cook it too long, so I usually don't.

When you're skinning the moose legs, on the front arm there's a muscle that goes to the foot, alongside the bone. You cut that off, and there's a certain little bone in there that's about six-seven inches long. It's tapered on one side to a sharp point, and then there's a blunt end. You save that, boil the bone good, and then scrape off all the membrane that's connected to it, and you could make a crochet hook or use it for different things. There's a lot of different things you can do with it.

²⁸⁸ Dry meat is like jerky, thin slices of meat hung to dry. Some people use seasonings, but some people prefer to dry the meat without seasonings. It was an easy snack to take on long dog sled runs.

²⁸⁹ Tallow is made by cooking (rendering) the fat and straining out the grease.

The leg bone is a very hard bone, and a long time ago, people used it to make a flesher to clean a moose hide. When you don't have nothing, and you have to start from scratch, you think of all the different things you could use a thing for.

With the caribou leg bone, while the bone is soft and fresh you can shape it and make a knife. I don't know how they used to do a long time ago, but right now, I'd use a saw, a little hack saw, and cut little slivers and make a snowshoe needle to weave the snowshoes with. I made a needle out of a bone, but it was taken. It was stolen out of my suitcase²⁹⁰ while I was working, so I lost that. So, you had to always keep in mind what you're gonna use this for, what you're gonna use that for. There's so much a person could use, but right now - you don't *need* to do that.

With the moose skin, you save it, and you make moose hide²⁹¹ out of it, or you could make babiche out of it, but the caribou skin has so much use. People use it for their parkas, to make parkies. You don't use the large caribou for that - you use the middle size, or the calves for children's clothing, maybe the year-old or two-years-old for parkies. You could use it for pants, and you could use the caribou skin to make a drum. For a mattress, it doesn't matter what size the caribou skin is. They used to dry that and use it for mattress. There are so many different uses for the skin, but you just have to know how.

²⁹⁰ The little blue suitcase that Effie kept all of her teaching aids in. She had collected those items for years.

²⁹¹ You can tan and smoke the whole moose skin, which is heavier and thicker than caribou.

Caribou skin was very important for our wear long time ago, because we didn't have nylon pants and stuff. The leggings²⁹² are very important, too. Starting the end of August, you save all the leggings for boots because they have short hair and very durable skin. So, they're very good for mukluks. You can never have too many. From one pair of caribou legs, from one set, you could make a little boots, and then if you want to make long boots, you have to have two caribou, so you always have to keep planning.

Not only that, you also get sinew²⁹³ from the caribou or the moose. You get the sinew from the back-strap...the muscles on the back. You start from the hip and then you take it out, and you cut it off the back-strap.

When I told my husband that I want to save the back strap, he said, "Well, you're just ruining the meat." But you still get the back bone for all the soup and other things you can make; it just spoils the back-strap for making steaks and stuff.

You take the arm off the caribou or the moose, and you cut the sinew from the hip bone. You lift it and cut around very gently. When you get to where you took the arm off, don't cut it off, just let it run out as much as you can, the tip of where the sinew goes. If you cut it off too soon, you'll cut off of the tapered part, the needle.

When you save the sinew, you have to do it when you're skinning the moose, or caribou, because the heat of the meat will weaken the sinew. It will make it sort of

²⁹² Leggings are the hide that is removed from the caribou leg.

²⁹³ Sinew is a stringy membrane that can be used for sewing. It is a strong thread.

brittle. So the sooner you take it off and separate the back strap from the carcass, the better it is.

The sinew has a lot of uses. You can make the sinew as small as you want, because when you clean the sinew and dry it, you could tear it any size you want. You could make a thin string, or you could make a thicker sinew for sewing. A long time ago people used to tear it apart and twist it, and then take two of them and make a rope as big as you want. Like when you buy a rope in the store, it's twisted and twined together. You could do that with sinew. That's what they used to use for a bow and arrow. It makes a very strong bow and arrow string.

When you're skinning the moose, and if you want to save the bladder, you take the bladder off very gently. You cut it about an inch or so past where the muscle is on the bladder, and you set it aside. Don't put it where it will touch the meat, because it has to be washed.

When you get home, you wash the bladder real good. Then you take a willow about the size of your thumb or a little bigger, just about three inches long, and you get some kind of twine (a piece of rag is the best), and then you blow up the bladder like a balloon. Do it very gently and slowly and rub it, and you can stretch it out like a balloon. Then you stick the peeled stick in there with a little oil, so the stick won't get stuck after you tie it. Every day, you twist the stick so that it don't get stuck to the bladder. The stick will be like a cork, when you're through. You hang up the bladder for about three-four days until it's nice and dry.

When you take the string off and take the stick off, you have a container, and that's what they used to use for fish oil. Fish oil is juicy, just like your cooking oil, so you have to have a good container. The bladder also had a lot of uses.

When you take the heart out (the heart is like a big hunk of fat), you cut above the artery and then you put it aside. When you get ready to clean the heart, you cut around the artery, cut the skin, and you slip the heart out of the bag that surrounds it, then drain the blood out of the heart. You can save the heart and the fat. When you get home, you clean the fat out of the bag, and if you do it gently, it will come out real good. You can peel the fat right off, and then you just have the skin that covers the heart. You wash it real good and save the skin to put a draw-string on top, and it's gonna be just like a Mason jar, or something.

You make the opening as big as you want and stuff it full of a towel to dry it. If you put paper or something in there, the paper will stick to the skin, and you'll lose what you're doing. If you use towel, it doesn't get stuck to it. Dry it for about two-three days, and then you have a bag.

That is the bag that my daddy used to use for a lunch pail. People way back, as far back as the human goes, that was the lunch pail. When you put your food in there, it's always clean. You could put dry fish, meat, or anything in there, and put it in your packsack, and your lunch will be clean. You could use the bag as a container for other things, but lunch pail is what it's mostly used for.



Fig. A.II.1 Heart Bag Made by Effie

If the bladder hasn't been used for fish oil, when people used to go hunting, they could use it for a water container, like a canteen. It's very handy and useful.

While we're talking about making oil and stuff, bear grease is very good grease to save, too. They are called bear grease, moose tallow, and fish oil, because they're all different. From the moose, you can make tallow, and you could pick it up with your hand, in a chunk.

The bear grease is sort of sticky, and you have to have a container. It's very good for cooking.

Appendix III

Remembering Back to Tanana

Talking about the Junior Dogmusher's had reminded Effie about what it was like for young kids in Tanana when she lived there. She started talking about how they entertained the kids there, compared to the advantages kids in Fairbanks had at the time of this recording.

These kids up in Fairbanks here got so much opportunity to learn things, but in the villages, I don't know if they have as many children's races. They also have all kinds of sports, basketball and skiing and everything like that, but when we were living down in Tanana - they never had those things. It was hard, because the kids had nothing - no activities that were planned for them, except just play after school, and do things.

I tried to give my kids more opportunities, like have activities for them, and everything I did, they were involved. Then in the evening, I'd be home with them, because I didn't go no place. I wasn't allowed to go any place, like go out visiting with my friends and stuff. So the kids used to always come to my house. I had kids of all ages. So, people used to come to my house and people used to leave their kids with me at night. When it was winter time and you can't play outdoors, they used to come around and we'd play cards. We didn't have no cookies or stuff, we couldn't afford no cookies or stuff. We just drank tea, and the kids used to love my bread. Sometimes I'd have salmon strips, I'd give to the kids, and we'd sit around.²⁹⁴

²⁹⁴ Effie made perfect bread from scratch, and the best salmon strips. Of course, people have regional preference in salmon strips because salmon have varying levels of omega oils by region, and recipes vary. To me her strips were perfect; she took such good care preparing them, and they had no bones.

But, most of all I'd tell them stories - about the old time stories. And, amongst those kids was Morris Thompson.²⁹⁵ He used to come back to my house, because they lived on First Street, sort of behind my house, and he used to come back and spend some time with my children. He told me afterwards, he said that's what he remembered most about me was the Native stories. So I'd like to tell one of my favorite stories right now - it's about Dotson'sa. Of course, I told you already, Dotson'sa is Mr. Crow.

Athabascan Explanation Story

Dotson'sa is a big joker, you just have to smile when you think of him. He was lazy, and he didn't want to work - he didn't want to hunt, but he was a good fibber and he had a good imagination. And so when the men go out hunting, he'd always find an excuse. "Oh, I don't feel good," and they let him go, because his canoe was no good, and his paddle was all patched up, and pieced together, or something, and he never had nothing, because he was just too lazy. And he likes to say, "Oh, I'm sick - I need to have something to eat." So people used to give him something to eat all the time, and he was just a joke.

And one time, these men were going out hunting in the fall, and he said, "Oh, I'm sick...I just can't go...I can't do anything." So the men said, "OK", and they left him behind.

Then the girls wanted to pick berries, and you know how the women stand around talking. They'd say "Oh, she

²⁹⁵ Morris Thompson grew to be a great leader of the Athabascan people of the Interior, but his influence reached far beyond Alaska. He was involved in ANCSA, served as the Head of BIA under Secretary of the Interior Walter Hickel, in Washington, D.C. and was President/CEO of Doyon, Ltd. for 15 years until his retirement. He, wife Thelma and daughter Sheryl perished in Alaska Airlines Flight 261, January 31, 2000.

would like to go across to the island," (or across the slough, or wherever they were), they'd say "Well, I'd like to go across there and pick berries - there's a lot of berries over there."

Dotson'sa would say, "Well, I'll take you across." And they'd say, "In what?" And he says, "In my canoe." And so they thought about it, and they said, "Well, why not?"

So he took two of them across, one of them in front of him, and one in the back, and then he came back and got the rest. And there was one sort of young girl - and she tried to get in the canoe, and he said, "Oh, no, you wait, you stay behind - wait 'til I get these others over."

Pretty soon, she was the only one left, and he kept making excuses for her to stay back. When he came back to get her, she got in the back of him, in the canoe, with their back to each other. They were in a one-man canoe. As he was paddling, when he got back in to the middle of the stream, he said, "*Dotson je'nee lee, dotson je'nee lee,*" and that means "The current is taking me away...the current is taking me away." And he started to paddle, and he started to paddle down the river. Those girls, they couldn't do nothing, because they didn't have no boat to chase him or anything. This girl was scared, so she just sat still, and he kidnapped her! And he kept doing down, kept going down river, and she was scared. She tried to plead with him, but he won't listen.

In those days, the women used to always carry their sewing kit in their pocket, no matter where you go, you bring your sewing kit with you. And she had her sewing kit - maybe a little needle, and a little thread, or something

in her pocket. While they were floating down the river, she took his shirt-tail, and she sewed it real tight to the cross-piece on the canoe. He didn't feel it when she sewed his shirt to the cross-piece.

She asked him to stop, maybe so she could go to the bathroom, and he tied a rope around her to make sure that she came back.

She tied this rope to a little spruce tree, and then left there, and she started running home. And running home, she picked a place where there was lots of thorns and a lot of willows, so that he'll have a hard time following her.

He yelled, "Hurry up, come on!" And he pulled the rope, and the rope gave a little bit. And so he says, "Come on, hurry up!" He pulled the rope again, and it's just like she was moving. He got mad, and he said "Come on, hurry up!" He pulled the rope hard, and it wouldn't budge. He pulled it real hard again, and then this little spruce tree came tumbling down the bank.

When he found out what happened, he got mad! So he was gonna jump out of the canoe, but his shirt was stuck. And he tried to jump out again, and then he found out his shirt was sewed to the cross-piece. He tried and tried, and, like I said, he had an old canoe that was rotten, and just barely holding together.

He finally broke it loose, and he started to run after her. He ran, and ran, and ran, and he ran all night long, and she still beat him back to camp. She was all scratched up and exhausted, and everything.

Dotson'sa came back to camp, limping, with a feel-sorry-for-me look on his face. He was OK, because he's like a medicine man, he could wish something, and it will happen. So he wished, "Oh, I wish she would just bleed to death. I wish that something would happen to her."

So she was laying there bleeding, for I don't know how long. And she was getting worse 'cause she was losing so much blood. And he was fine, and everything. And because he willed it, she died one night. When her spirit left her, her spirit took off, and it turned into a willow grouse. It perched on top of the house and then flew away. And, they say that's why the willow grouse has got pale meat, very light meat, and they don't have too much blood, because she lost all her blood bleeding through the wounds on her legs.

Conclusion

Now I'm proud because one of the memories that Morris had of his childhood was listening to me talk.²⁹⁶ That's what kids needed, someone to give them attention in the evenings, and I had nothing else to do. It is very important in parenting, to spend some time with your children. Not just listening to TV, or entertaining themself with artificial stuff. Just watching TV is not like human contact, which is very important. It was a very good thing, long time ago, that people didn't have radio and TV, so that they (some of them, I'm not saying all of them) spent lots of time with their children.

²⁹⁶ Effie said that Morris' father was pretty strict about who he spent time with. His father was the Commissioner that married Andrew and Effie.

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